Ecological modernisation and new rural housing

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PhD Thesis.
King's College London
2003

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Abstract

This research addresses the environmental implications of new housing developments in rural areas in England. The construction of new houses in rural areas is controversial, often affecting areas close to existing settlements that are valued for their landscape or wildlife qualities. Wider environmental concerns associated with new housing are becoming increasingly significant including energy consumption, water consumption and estate designs that promote car use. Local councils use the land use planning system to arbitrate between conflicting interests. Three different groups of actors are the focus of this research: house builders, environmental groups and the local council and all have different environmental issues they regard as priorities when new houses are built. In exploring their behaviour, theoretical expectations on the uneven influence of different groups in the development process will be explored. For construction companies there are differences in operational spheres. Larger companies that operate at a national level have the potential to play-off one area against another. More localised companies might reveal more conscious attention to the peculiarities of local environmental concerns. An important theoretical component of the research addresses whether Ecological Modernisation is affecting new house building. Do the agents involved believe 'win-win' solutions are possible. The in-depth study area used in this research is the county of Bedfordshire. It is an area that is subject to intense development pressure, with many of its settlements within commuting distance from London. Only part of Bedfordshire is subject to strict planning control through the use of greenbelt.

Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis examines the nature of environmental measures incorporated into new house building in rural areas. The desire to build greener houses can be linked to the green consumer movement, for buying a green house is the logical conclusion for consumers already committed to green washing-up liquid and green washing machines. The decision of whether to build houses in more or less environmentally sound ways has implications far beyond the individual buyer of the house. The way in which we design and plan our new houses impacts on the environment, from the local to the global, by causing local traffic congestion and by contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. Hardly surprisingly, then, housing policy has caused dilemmas for successive governments, as the stiff opposition that has arisen over recent proposals to develop new housing in the countryside have reminded us. However, the response to this issue by most mainstream environmental non-governmental organisations has been limited. Such organisations have tended to exploit the issue of housing selectively, as campaign opportunities present themselves, but have not devoted substantial financial or staff resources to engage with the wide range of environmental issues that new housing developments raise. The academic community with research interests in the environment have likewise largely steered away from housing as a topic for research. The environmental implications of local land use and planning conflicts, along with new road building have been much more popular themes. Seen in reverse, academics with a research interest in housing have similarly tended to address the environment as a side issue, as an item that can influence housing policies or schemes rather than as a central component of mainstream housing policy. This research aims to go some way towards filling an important gap in the research literature by looking holistically at housing policy and environmental policy in a rural context in England. In order to help the reader appreciate the scope and themes of this thesis, this introductory chapter is organised as a series of questions, which explain the main research question, introduce the theoretical framework for the research, and place the research in the context of other academic research in this field. This introduction will also explore the rationale behind the selection of the case study area,

the English county of Bedfordshire. At the end, the chapter provides an outline of the structure of the thesis.

What is the primary research question?

Are environmental standards being raised in new housing developments in rural England? If standards are being raised, is this a result of ecological modernisation? In simple terms ecological modernisation can be described as an improvement in environmental standards that is good for business, reducing costs and increasing profits, while at the same time benefiting the environment. Most examples of ecological modernisation in the research literature are taken from manufacturing. For example, a paper plant could alter its production processes to reduce water demand and waste output, thereby reducing its operating costs and environmental impact at the same time (Rocky Mountain Institute, 2003). Ecological modernisation has also been applied to consumer products. Consumers may be willing to pay more for an appliance, such as a washing machine, if it brings benefit for the environment by reducing water and energy use and reduces utility bills by using less water and less energy. Some of the higher price paid by the consumer will be extra profit for the company producing the item, thereby benefiting the company. For ecological modernisation to 'work' the main actors in the policy process must accept the central precept of ecological modernisation, that business needs and environmental concerns can be reconciled. In terms of housing, ecological modernisation could manifest itself in three main ways. Firstly, builders may be able to reduce construction costs by, for example, reducing waste caused during the construction process. This results in building companies getting a direct financial benefit by buying less materials and then by having reduced costs of sending the waste to landfill. Secondly, builders may add environmental features, such as improved home insulation, which, over time, would save money for the owners of the house. Some measures that reduce costs could also improve housing quality, as with a house that is better insulated potentially being more comfortable to live in due to reduced draughts. Of course, in order to add these features, builders must be confident that consumers are willing to pay for them, but if builder profit comes as a percentage of sale price, then these added items can bring company gains as well. Finally, there are items that builders may specify, such as timber from renewable sources or landscaping and wildlife features associated with a new housing estate, which benefit the environment. Consumers might gain no direct financial return or any direct housing benefits, such as improved comfort in the home, but they might gain from an improved local environment, while builders might find that the homes they have built are

more attractive to buyers. However these later examples can add to the cost of the house for the consumer and could lead to further social exclusivity in new housing in rural areas.

Why research new housing development in rural England?

New house building in the countryside is a key concern for policy makers from local authority planners to national ministers with responsibility for the environment, rural affairs and planning. It is the contemporary policy relevance of new housing in rural areas that makes it an important area to study in its own right and an interesting case study to apply the theoretical framework of ecological modernisation. National projections continue to show that more new housing is needed, especially with increased rates of new household formation. For the period 1991-2016, it is estimated that 4.1 million new households are expected to form (Office of National Statistics, 2003). From 25%-50% of these new households are proposed to be accommodated in new houses built on greenfield sites. Despite figures being revised or targets for brownfield development being made more ambitious, there still remains a significant number of dwellings that will need to be accommodated on greenfield sites. Increased public awareness of environmental issues, including concern for wildlife, landscape and other environmental resources, makes house building in rural areas controversial. Thus, when the British Social Attitudes Survey (Jowell et al, 1996) asked people what they were most concerned about in the countryside, 27% said development, 24% pollution and 19% the removal of hedges and woodlands. Similarly, the Government's Rural White Paper (HMSO, 1995) reported on a survey of public opinion that showed that 93% of people believe that the countryside is valuable and 91% believe that society has a moral duty to protect the countryside for future generations. Significantly in this regard, the environment is an issue over which many people are prepared to take political action. Thus, when asked, women aged 18-34 years indicated that they were five times more likely to take action on an environmental issue and men three times more likely than on any other political issue (Wilkinson and Mulgan, 1995).

Within a political environment in which there is growing pressure for more housing to be built, it is important to note that conflicts about housing have produced public debates and campaigning activity at every level, which has engaged a large number of

NGOs and other actors. Indeed, in recent years, there have been periods of intense media interest over the construction of new housing on greenfield sites. These periods include the Autumn of 1997, the Spring of 1998 and the Autumn of 1999, when there was an intensity of attention similar to the anti-roads sentiments of the late 1980s and early 1990s. A number of detailed studies have been completed on the anti-roads movement, which provide parallels to this study. In her study of the environmental protest directed at the Twyford Down motorway extension, Bryant (1996) gives an account of disparate groups coming together around a common cause. In more recent work, Wall (1999) analyses Earth First! and road protest movements in Britain as a new social movements, while Doherty (1999) examines the rise in direct action against road building. Much of this work was only published after government decisions to scale down Britain's new roads programme, so the work of Bryant, Doherty, Wall and others did not add to the policy debate when decisions were still being made. By contrast, this research can add to policy debate at a time new rural housing is still an important policy issue. With major cut-backs in the roads programme in recent years, house building has overtaken transport as a primary concern for many local environmental and amenity groups. So is the housing debate just a 'Not In My Back Yard' protest to a locally unwanted development? This is certainly the impression that can be derived from media interest in housing. Yet media coverage is often focused on specific housing development sites, such as Newcastle and the west of Stevenage, or focuses on the problems of specific counties, such as West Sussex or Herefordshire. This coverage often centres on conflicts between environmental interests and development interests, as well as providing a focus on certain aspects of environment concern, such as landscape, green belts and wildlife, particularly as regards protected species. This research aims to go beyond one or two scales. As well as amenity and wildlife concerns, which were at the centre of earlier periods of opposition to new greenfield developments, wider concerns are now being raised. For example, there is concern about the role of greenhouse gas emissions from the UK housing stock, and of the economic and environmental cost of supplying water to new settlements. What constitutes a green house in terms of an individual dwelling, the layout and design of estates, and the location of developments, are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

How does the thesis contribute to the rural housing literature?

As a nation of primarily urban dwellers people in Britain are still pre-occupied with 'the rural'. It occupies a central place in our national consciousness and many of our ideas about Englishness are firmly routed in the rural (e.g. Matless, 1998). There is a large body of research looking at the rural in the Britain, within which there is a strong focus on agriculture and the role of farmers in the countryside, with, until recently, less attention paid to other actors who produce and consume the countryside. Illustrative of this, the literature on rural housing in Britain is fairly small. The literature on which this research draws can be expanded slightly if other development issues that cause conflict in rural areas, such as golf courses, gravel extraction, industrial developments and roads, are considered. Issues such as the influence of class and home ownership, and the role these play in encouraging residents to object to 'development' schemes is a strong feature housing related research, although as yet there has still been little that directly explores protest against housing in rural contexts. There is also a limited amount of work that looks at how environmental constraints, such as greenbelt and policies in rural local plans push up house prices, so making it difficult for many local people to access the housing markets (e.g. Elson, 1986, Shucksmith, 2000). Many policy documents that have addressed the problems of rural England including access to rural transport, rural employment and access to rural services (HMSO, 1995, LGA, 1998, Performance and Innovation Unit, 1999). These reports have either underplayed the importance of housing, in the case of the 1995 Rural White Paper, or in the case of the LGA report 'Behind the Scenery' or the PIU report 'Rural Economies' ignored it all together. In both these bodies of research the environment itself is often under-theorised or greatly simplified as being equivalent to landscape or greenbelt. This thesis provides one of the few studies to date that explores the environmental dimensions of housing development directly, and so offers the potential to add insight onto other debates on rural housing by exploring central housing issues through a different lens.

Why is ecological modernisation the main theoretical framework and not sustainable development?

Ecological modernisation provides the primary theoretical framework for this research. The choice of ecological modernisation might be seen as idiosyncratic at best, or perverse at worst. This is because the concept of ecological modernisation is generally not mentioned in national or local policy documents, whereas the concept of sustainable development lauded in the majority of them. I will argue that many national policy documents 'mean' ecological modernisation when they are talking about environmental policy, even though this term from the academic literature is not itself used. Ecological modernisation was a key part of the UK's approach to environmental policy through both the Conservative and the New Labour governments of the 1990s. This national government (and European) focus on ecological modernisation is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two. An important reason for the focus on ecological modernisation is the way in which this concept brings together ideas about the relationship between business and the environment. Sustainable development raises other issues, that it is not the intention of this research to cover in any depth, including the concept of need, in this case housing need. Sustainable development would consider the need for new housing provision whereas an ecological modernisation approach would simply consider how to carry out the development in a 'green' way. The concepts of inter- and intra-generational equity are also central to sustainable development but are marginal to ecological modernisation and will also not be considered in detail in this research. Yet it is hoped that this research will be able to reflect back on ecological modernisation, as a concept, to provide new insights on this framework. That said, the enthusiasm for ecological modernisation that exists in some policy circles, and amongst some academics, is not blindly followed in this thesis. Investigating the propositions of ecological modernisation started out as an interesting theme to explore, but it was always recognised that at the end of the research a primary conclusion reached could be that it is a 'straw man'. Empirically, it is feasible that environmental standards are not being raised, and it is business as usual in the British house-building market, or an explanation other than ecological modernisation is better suited to accounting for why builders are raising their environmental standards (if they are doing so).

What other academic literatures inform this research?

Apart from research that directly relates to planning and environmental conflicts in rural Britain, a number of fields of academic research provide important insights for this thesis. The local government literature provides a background on the willingness or unwillingness of local government bodies to seek to raise environmental standards in rural housing. Much of this literature argues that there has been a decline in the importance of local government as a political force over the past 25 years, and notes the increasingly active role of the central government in providing policy direction. For some, this has resulted in local governments that are unwilling and unable to impose higher environmental standards (Bruff & Wood,1995). Added to which, even at the local level, there has been a shift from government to governance amongst rural local authorities, with an increasing integration of quasi-governmental, non-governmental and private sector institutions into local government policy-making circles (Goodwin, 1998). This is a trend that is explored in more detail in Chapter Seven. As one element of this shift toward governance is the potential for environmental groups to have a greater input into local government policy. The literature relating to environmental pressure groups is one that gets attention in this thesis. Some of this literature involves in-depth studies of particular environmental conflicts or environmental groups. Other studies try to follow the progress of the environment movement, including theoretical debates about the environment movement as a new social movement. The role that environmental groups have in assessing the environmental standards adopted by builders, and putting pressure on them to raise standards, is an important component of this research, so theoretical issues relating to these groups needs to be addressed. Likewise, the literature on policy implementation, much of which dates back to the 1980s, also informs this research. This literature helps to explain how, for example, expressions in support for greener housing in a policy document fail to appear on the ground.

What could explain higher environmental standards apart from ecological modernisation?

There are a number of possible reasons that builders could choose to construct

housing to higher environmental standards that are not related to explanations that derived from the ideas of ecological modernisation. Firstly, builders might not accept the precepts of ecological modernisation but could be aware that they need to raise environmental standards in order to gain planning permission for their building schemes. They would therefore be responding to pressure from local government, rather than to any understanding that higher environmental standards can bring all-round benefits. Indeed, environmental standards may have been raised at a European and national level, so forcing builders to raise local house building standards. Examples of this could be building regulations that are determined nationally and Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations that are the subject of action at the EU level. It might also be that builders are concerned by adverse publicity associated with their industry, and seek to raise standards in order to improve the image of their business. This could lead to a rethinking of schemes in order to lessen the chances of objections to development proposals or even of builders seeking to avoid particular areas as development sites. It is also feasible that changes in builder behaviour result from companies responding to pressure from a trade association to improve environmental standards within the industry. There could even be a growth in altruistic green consumerism, with customers willing to pay more for a green product, even when it does not give them immediate financial returns. Finally, house-builders may behave in a non-economically rational way, taking pride in producing a well-crafted product or having a genuine philanthropic desire that their actions should benefit a wider society.

Why Bedfordshire?

The empirical material for this investigation draws on an in-depth study in the county of Bedfordshire. This county was selected as it is experiencing considerable development pressure, which was an important criterion for study area selection, in order to ensure that there would be enough residential planning applications to analyse. Bedfordshire is divided into three district council areas, all of which have different local priorities, settlement structures and physical characteristics. South Bedfordshire's settlement pattern is dominated by the fairly affluent London commuter town of Leighton Buzzard, and its poorer, traffic blighted neighbours of Luton and Dunstable. Much of the countryside of South Bedfordshire is designated as

green belt. Mid Bedfordshire is composed of many smaller settlements, is without extensive green belt areas and is currently concerned by the outward expansion of Milton Keynes towards it, as well as the scale of development in the market towns of Sandy and Biggleswade. Bedford Borough Council includes both the county town and its surrounding rural areas, with the more extensive countryside portion lying to the north. This borough is where large strategic allocations of 1,000 and more houses are occurring. However, the north of the county contains many small rural settlements which have seen few housing completions. Hence, Bedfordshire provides enough contrast to look at the effects of policy tools, such as the greenbelt, but also reveals enough similarities that comparisons across the county are not meaningless. In this county, the five years 1995-2000 were selected for the study period for this thesis, as it is felt that if ecological modernisation is manifest in the county, then this is most likely to be evident in recent years

What are higher environmental standards?

This research is being carried out as a piece of social science academic enquiry. It is not the intention to measure U values on windows in new housing estates or depth of loft insulation. There is already a considerable body of research at the scale of the individual house on green building methods and environmentally-friendly materials (Borer & Harris, 1998; Rydin, 1992). While there is science that supports a move towards improved environmental standards, it is important to note that these 'facts' are not uncontested. All the different actors in the policy process, including builders, local government representatives and environmental pressure groups have different ideas about what is meant by higher environmental standards. Raising environmental standards is taken in this research in a broad sense. It can relate to the level of the individual house, to the layout and design of a housing estate, and to the location chosen for a residential development. However, it is not the intention of this research to present a melee of conflicting positions and values. By drawing evidence from a range of different sources, such as newspapers, in-depth interviews, policy documents or planning application data, it is hoped to corroborate a story line, or at least narrow areas of disagreement. By interviewing a range of actors with knowledge of the Bedfordshire housing market, including builders, those in local government,

environmental groups and a variety of third parties, such as MPs, regional government officials and journalists, the thesis has adopted an interviewing strategy that enables actors to provide information on the attitudes and behaviour of other actors, as well as their own, so that insight on different views on higher environmental standards can be derived from those holding dissimilar perspectives.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter 2: Ecological Modernisation

This chapter presents an overview of the ecological modernisation literature and relates this material to the UK context. It presents the case that ecological modernisation is a central policy discourse, that is used by the national government in drawing up environmental policy.

Chapter 3: Green Housing

This chapter addresses the issue of what is meant by green housing. The chapter explores what is possible to achieve in the UK in terms of green housing design. In doing so, it addresses green housing issues at the level of the individual house, at the level of estate design and in terms of the locational choice for the estate.

Chapter 4: Bedfordshire: The Context of Local House Building and Housing Conflicts

This chapter provides important background material about land-use planning and the environmental context of the case study county of Bedfordshire. It also draws heavily on local media reporting to set the scene for the later chapters that are centred around each of the main types of actor involved in considering environmental standards in new housing development. In part, this is achieved through an examination of local media coverage of issues related to housing (to identify how far these are in the public arena), with particular regard to establishing how far the environment is central to policy conflict.

Chapter 5: Methodology

This chapter explains the choice of the case study approach to the research question. Included amongst the methodological issues it addresses is a discussion of how

decisions were reached on who to consider to be key actors. The chapter also discusses the different data collection methods used, including procedures for the semi-structured interviews with key actors.

Chapter 6: Local Environmental Groups

This chapter begins by outlining the literature relating to local environmental activism in the UK. In analysing interview transcripts and other supporting written material a key question is to what extent environmental groups are successful in lobbying builder to develop to higher environmental standards. Linked to this central question are a number of subsidiary questions including; how much of a priority is new rural housing to environmental pressure groups; what environmental issues do they focus their attention on when applying pressure on housing issues; what campaign techniques do pressure groups adopt; and is there a difference in influence achieved by different environmental groups, as related to concepts such as the insider-outsider distinction.

Chapter 7: Local Government

This chapter begins with a theoretical discussion about the role of the local state. It goes on to ask how local authorities behave when conflicts arise over new rural housing developments. This is linked to the question of how effective local authorities are in raising environmental standards through the development control and strategic planning processes. In a context in which the county is expected to receive substantial volumes of new housing development, and with local authorities in general being seen to have stronger links with business organisations (Peck, 1995), a further important issue here is whether local authorities side with developers or with environmental pressure groups when conflicts arise.

Chapter 8: House Builders

This chapter examines the actions of the house-building industry in Bedfordshire. It is designed to explore the nature of the housing market in the county, as faced by developers themselves, as to examine what environmental issues are seen to be a priority for builders when they are designing and constructing new developments. As well as exploring the kinds of environmental enhancements that builders see as being

important element sin their development schemes, the chapter enquires into the reasons for those elements being present, as well as into the failure of builders to incorporate some environmentally-friendly initiatives into their development portfolios. This commentary inevitably links in with a consideration of how important are environmental concerns to construction company businesses compared to other issues. The structure of the chapter in its entirety is thereby designed to cast light on whether builders accept the precepts of ecological modernisation in their development decisions.

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Chapter Two

Ecological Modernisation

Ecological modernisation provides the theoretical framework for this research. This chapter is designed to review different commentators' perspectives on ecological modernisation, to contrast such views with the largely competing discourse of sustainable development and to relate the theoretical framework of ecological modernisation to this research. The chapter begins by giving a general overview of ecological modernisation, outlining areas of broad agreement among researchers. The origins of ecological modernisation in early work by Huber (1982, in Mol, 1995) are then discussed. The chapter discusses the emergence of ecological modernisation and presents contrasting view points from key researchers. The emergence of ecological modernisation is linked to broader trends within the social sciences, including two key research areas that have influenced the origin and direction of interpretations of ecological modernisation; namely, increased interest by social scientists in consumption, and the New Ecological Paradigm. The New Ecological Paradigm within the social sciences led to a renewed interest in the relationship between nature and both the natural sciences and the social sciences. In some interpretations, ecological modernisation is pursued as a narrow and technocratic agenda. In this technological approach, actions of producer or corporate interests in adopting new environmentally-sound practices are the focus of interest. For others, the most important evidence for ecological modernisation is a shift in policy by government and government agencies. Ecological modernisation as a tool for policy makers, and its take-up by policy makers in the UK are another important focus for the chapter. Finally, despite the evidence presented by supporters of ecological modernisation, some commentators, mainly those from the political left and from NGOs, dismiss ecological modernisation for its lack of substance, seeing its promotion as a 'ploy' to distract attention from the 'reality' of business and governmental actions.

The aim of this research is to add to the theoretical debate about ecological modernisation, using the subject of new rural housing to provide fresh insights. The need for such new insights is highlighted by Young (2000), who draws attention to

the uneven coverage of research in ecological modernisation to date. He argues that further research is needed to address why the promotion and practice of ecological modernisation varies from economic sector to economic sector. He expresses concern that much research has focused on a limited number of sectors, like paper and chemical production, and has neglected other sectors, such as services, agriculture and non-manufacturing sectors. In this regard it is worth noting that Leroy and van Tatenhove (2000) specifically highlight housing and furniture as two important sectors that have not received any research attention. More generally, reviewers across a range of sectors have suggested that there is still considerable scope for empirical research on ecological modernisation. However, it is important to avoid the potential trap highlighted by Mol (1999), of trying to interpret every institutional development or environmental practice as a local variety of ecological modernisation. Mol (1996) highlights a further important gap in the ecological modernisation literature, which is that a preoccupation with institutional analysis has left the political and ideological dimensions of ecological modernisation under-theorised. A further problem with much ecological modernisation research is its focus on discourse, as explored by Dryzek (1997). He considers the potential problems of a discourse-centred approach to ecological modernisation, such as that promoted by Hajer (1995). He is critical of Hajer, arguing that he does not acknowledge that the environment may be real and may exist independently of social construction. According to Dryzek, Hajer also does not compare the relative impact of discourse on policy outcomes with other traditional policy literature variables, like policy instruments, institutional structures and resources. Considering these gaps in the literature, particularly the political and ideological dimensions, and the focus on a limited number of economic sectors, this research hopes to go some way toward filling part of those key gaps.

Whilst there are broad areas of agreement about the central tenets of ecological modernisation, there are distinct differences of interpretive emphasis among academics. Hence, according to Young (2000), the term ecological modernisation is used in three main ways. The first interpretation is found in relation to broad debates about social theory, which encompass discussions about the relationship between institutions and the environment in sociology (Spaargaren & Mol, 1992), and embrace theorising about modernity and post-modernity (Giddens, 1990). Here ecological modernisation is more likely to be interpreted as a way of understanding broad trends

in our society and their relationship to the natural environment. Secondly, ecological modernisation is presented by social scientists as a new paradigm for analysing the changing nature of environmental politics and policies since the 1980s. Here ecological modernisation is more likely to be used to understand broad shifts in environmental policy, such as the shift away from regulation to the use of other tools, including fiscal measures, to achieve environmental objectives. The third interpretation by Young (2000) is a prescriptive programme of environmental policies, that are designed to tackle environmental problems in industrialised democracies. It is this third version that tends to be used by NGOs and political leaders. But whatever the support for these different interpretations, what brings further into the forefront the varied interpretations of ecological modernisation as a conceptualisation, is the multiplicity of categorisations of the concept. Thus, in contrast with Young, Christoff (1996) also provides an interpretation of three different ways in which the concept ecological modernisation can be understood, although these are not entirely comparable with those of Young. Firstly, Christoff holds that ecological modernisation can be seen as environmentally sensitive technological change. Secondly, it can be interpreted as a style of policy discourse that serves to foster better environmental management. Thirdly, its critics see ecological modernisation as a 'distracting concept', a ploy by governments to manage dissent and legitimise ongoing environmental destruction. A further interpretation comes from Dryzek (1997), who describes ecological modernisation as the ecological restructuring of capitalism, with this vision having some links to the Gouldson and Murphey (1996) view that ecological modernisation refers to how capitalism can accommodate the environmental challenge. But what do all these views mean? Importantly, they signify that there is no canonical statement that defines ecological modernisation, as exists, for example, in the Brundtland definition of sustainable development. Within the competing definitions that exist, four distinct strands emerge: environmental policy changes; debates in social theory about modernity; environmentally-sensitive technological change; and some form of ploy to damage environmental progress. This chapter continues by focusing on the emergence of ideas on ecological modernisation, in which the technological change interpretation has played an important role.

Emergence of an Idea

Ecological modernisation was first developed within a fairly small group of environmental social scientists mainly within the disciplines of politics and sociology. Since then ecological modernisation has become more mainstream, with most of those working on relationships between environment and society, and focusing on the state, production and consumption; likely to be aware of it (Gibbs, 2000). It should be noted that interest in ecological modernisation is a highly euro-centric phenomenon. It is also currently manufacturing sector centric, although there have been interesting developments in other sectors, such as agriculture, banking and insurance (Young, 2000). Christoff (1996, 2000), Hajer (1995) and Mol (1996) are three of the most important writers on ecological modernisation. These researchers have all attempted to resolve the definition of the concept and each of their attempts has certain features in common. For one, ecological modernisation is seen to identify modern science and technology as central for ecological reform. There is also a stress on the importance of economic and market dynamics in ecological reform. The assumption is that a process of industrial innovation, which is encouraged by a market economy and facilitated by an enabling state, will lead to environmental conservation. Francis Cairncross (1995), one of the leading exponents of this approach, captured an underlying sentiment here when he put forward the view that merely to oppose growth will achieve little. Instead, a wiser strategy for environmentalists is to look for ways in which growth and environmental improvement support each other, and to study ways to protect the environment at minimal economic cost. From this perspective, increased economic growth and environmental stress become uncoupled in a shift to a qualitatively new kind of economic growth.

Proponents of ecological modernisation seek to transform the perception of the environment as a policy problem. They argue that a clean environment and economic feasibility no longer need be in conflict in the way that earlier waves of environmental concern conceptualised them. The ecological modernisation approach regards the environmental challenge not as a crisis, but as creating opportunities. These ideas have been popularised in slogans such as 'pollution prevention pays' and creating 'win-win' situations. This conceptualisation brought to an end the view that the

environment was external to the institutional organisation of production and consumption.

Historically, the first academic writer to conceptualise the environment using an ecological modernisation approach was Huber (1982, in Mol, 1995). In the early 1980s he began to promote the idea that environmental problems could be solved by super-industrialisation. This represented a major departure from earlier approaches to environmental problems, with activists and academics advocating very different visions of the future, such as technology at a 'proper' scale (Schumacher, 1973) and a Steady State Economy (Daley, 1977). The approaches by Daley and Schumacher to environmental reform are essentially de-modernist. This de-modernist movement gave way, beginning with Huber, to a paradigm that further modernisation of production and consumption should be at the heart of environmental reformist intentions. Huber promoted the idea that the economy should be ecologised and that ecology should be economised. For ecology this would mean ridding itself of its romantic and holistic critique of modernity. From this perspective, the 'science' of ecology is seen to have often taken on an almost mystical cast, where ecology has a sensibility that is holistic, receptive, trustful, largely non-tampering and deeply grounded in aesthetic intuition (Stewart, 1998). To make an impact in the rational world of business and industry, ecology has to develop according to Huber into a full blown hard science of the sustenance base. These appeals for a hardening of the science of ecology have been welcomed by scientists practicing ecology, for whom it is a source of irritation that their discipline, which they endeavour to make as scientific and rational as possible, has become linked with a disparate collection of naturalists, poets, and small-scale farmers who constitute a visible part of the environmental movement (Evernden, 1992). For economics, according to Huber, business had to internalise its own costs, or, in a broader definition, focus on environmental concerns in the organisation of production and consumption. Huber saw only a limited role for the environmental movement and thought that only a limited amount of intervention by government was desirable. Consistent with much free-market thinking of the time, he argued that the state was as likely to confound innovation as to promote desirable outcomes. More recent views of the state in ecological modernisation research (see Blowers,1997, for a summary), describe the state as having an enabling role, by providing education, healthcare and welfare. Adding a further twist to the argument, Huber also proposed

that ecological modernisation is an inevitable phase in the development of industrial society. In this regard Huber's writing can be related to broad trends occurring within the social sciences, which were showing more willingness to embrace free market ideologies.

Commentators are divided about when ecological modernisation first appeared in policy circles. Christoff (1996) sees it as a change that happened to the environmental policy of OECD countries in the late 1980s. He identifies certain trends as indicators that ecological modernisation ideas were being acknowledged. For example, the prescriptive regulatory approach used in the 1970s came to be accompanied or displaced by voluntary agreements between government and industry. This is well exemplified in the UK by the regulatory approach taken by the Environment Agency, which negotiates with polluters on a case-by-case basis about emission licenses rather than setting fixed targets. A further example is the way environmental protection agencies seek to use industries' existing investment programmes and need for technological innovation to facilitate improvements in environmental outcomes. In contrast, when Hajer (1995) tracked the progress of ecological modernisation, he saw it emerging in the late 1970s, much earlier than Christoff. For Hajer ecological modernisation developed first in the secondary spheres of policy making within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Union for Nature Conservation and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This view is endorsed by Weale (1992), who discusses the way international organisations sought to use the new policy discourse as a way to secure acceptance of environmental programmes by business and national governments. Their efforts first reached a wider audience through the publication of the World Conservation Strategy in 1980 (UNEP, 1980). While focusing on habitats and wildlife, the Strategy argued for efficient resource use and considerate environmental planning. The OECD made an important contribution here, operating mainly as a think-tank in the period 1979-1984 that brought together politicians and civil servants from environment ministries. This phase concluded with an OECD conference in 1984 on 'The Environment and Economics'. This conference concluded that: "... the environment and economy, if property managed, are mutually reinforcing; and are supportive of and supported by technological innovation" (OECD, 1985, p10).

Young (2000) describes the EU as another supra-national arena where the main ideas of ecological modernisation emerged. Although the EU has a long history of formulating policies on technological development and environmental protection, these were not set out as explicit goals until the formulation of the Single European Act in 1987. In the EU Fourth Environmental Action Programme, published in 1986 officials at the EU drew heavily on environmental policies being developed in West Germany and the Netherlands (European Commission, 1986). But it was not until 1993 that the Maastricht Treaty established the principle that the goals of environmental policy should be incorporated into all other policy spheres. From this point onwards effective environmental protection was seen at the EU level as an integral part of economic development. Ecological modernisation thereby became an important element in the European Communities' fourth Environmental Action Programme, with this trend continuing into the subsequent fifth and sixth action programmes (European Commission, 1993, 2002). Rather than simply seeking to control specific processes or substances, the fifth and sixth action programmes gave priority to agriculture, tourism, energy, manufacturing, energy and transport. In doing so, the action programmes have tried to influence methods of production and consumption.

In North America also, there was movement toward accepting ecological modernisation ideas. This has been described by McAffee (1999), who sees a complex of linkages between ideology, institutions and practices in what she terms 'green developmentalism', which is strongly analogous to ecological modernisation. McAffee is critical of the role of discourse in green developmentalism, seeing the abstract rhetoric of 'market failure' as discursive camouflage for particular human agents and beneficiaries of environmental destruction. Although not hegemonic, for McAffee green developmentalism has become the predominant in environmental policy-making. This she links to dominant trends in US politics, for a green developmentalism worldview sees nature as subordinate to capitalism, because nature becomes an economic factor in its own right. As such, nature can be bought, sold and invested in. Hence, advocates of green developmentalism call for a variety of funds and incentives to subsidise the cost to private firms of green technologies. Here McAffee (1999) sees the dominance of neoliberalism as an important context for green developmentalism, with the neoliberal preference for privatisation lying behind

a desire to address problems by constructing markets in environmental goods. Green developmentalism therefore both reflects and reinforces the influence of neoliberalism. McAffee is not alone in criticising underlying rationalities for ecological modernisation in North America. Christoff (1996), for example, makes clear that not all policy measures associated with ecological modernisation are intended to resolve environmental problems. They are also shaped by a contest over political control of the environmental agenda. In this regard, in English-speaking countries, they are part of a questioning of the legitimacy of state regulation. But the critical message from this section is not about criticisms. Rather it is to make clear that by the late 1990s commentators accepted that ecological modernisation was a potent policy concern.

Ecological modernisation and social theory

Early research in environmental social science

Environmental social science research in the 1970s was strongly based in the methodological and theoretical mainstream of sociology at that time (e.g. Burch et al, 1972). It was not until the late 1970s that the environment began to take a more significant role in sociology, by challenging the neglect of the biophysical environment. The most influential work in the field at that time was provided by Dunlap and Catton (1979) and Schnaiberg (1980), who are commonly regarded as pioneers of a New Ecological Paradigm, where societies and the biophysical environment are seen to exist in reciprocal interaction. Dunlap, Catton and Schnaiberg placed considerable emphasis on the environmental movement, viewing this as a necessary and rational response to the environmental crisis, with political pressure from movement mobilisation as the principle mechanism for environmental improvement. Their New Ecological Paradigm rejected prevailing mainstream sociological views by arguing that the 'social' should not be treated in isolation from the 'natural' and that human societies cannot be understood by referring to internal social facts only. The point was also made that the problem of how to deal with nature cannot be avoided, because every political worldview incorporates certain assumptions and values bearing on the relationship of humans to the rest of nature (Eckersley, 1992).

While ecological modernisation has important elements in common with the New Ecological Paradigm, in that there is a need to go beyond the social and consider substance flows, energy flows and material flows through human society, there are key differences. For one, all interpretations of ecological modernisation still consider technology, capital and labour to be important, so they do not attempt to replace an earlier disregard for the environment with a form of biologism or ecologism. For example, in Mol's (1996) writing he does not attempt to elevate the natural over the social as ecologism and biologism do. He argues rather that in ecological modernisation the emancipation of ecological rationality is not seen as a process towards the dominance of the ecological sphere over the economic sphere. Ecological rationality and economic rationality are thereby seen as having their own realm and legitimacy that are relatively independent of each other, as well as being directed at different goals. The second important difference between the New Ecological Paradigm and ecological modernisation lies in the focus of early New Ecological Paradigm work on environmental destruction, while ecological modernisation focuses on environmental improvement. The third important difference is the role of the environmental movement, which plays a more marginal role in ecological modernisation than under the New Ecological Paradigm. This concern with the role and meaning of nature in the social sciences may seem very abstract, in a piece of research examining policy-making. However, it is an important first step because how people understand their relationship with the environment is not merely a desirable condition in improved planning but is central to better environmental management (Redclift, 1987).

Ecological modernisation and consumption

The second important trend within the social sciences, in addition to a focus on the environment that favoured the development of ecological modernisation, was a new interest in production and materials. Since the 1970s Baudrillard (1983) had argued that social scientists need to consider consumption as well as production in academic enquiries. Ecological modernisation gained from this new interest, as the consumer is no longer seen simply as an end-user but is treated as a decisive factor in explaining the dynamics of production and consumption. These sociologies of consumption, which have been presented by academics like Featherstone (1991), Saunders (1988) and Warde (1990), examine issues ranging from how current (post-Fordist) regimes of

production and consumption affect the relationship between products, to people's willingness to use consumer products to express certain lifestyles or identities. The link between these consumption values and environmental improvements has been captured by Inglehart (1977) in his landmark book *The Silent Revolution*. He argued that the experiences of people born after the Second World War were fundamentally different from their grandparents and parents. Concerns about poverty, housing and material considerations were replaced, particularly among the better educated, by concerns about the environment and other non-material values. These new values affected people's behaviour as consumers, as seen in demands for green products, in membership of local groups, including civic and environmental groups, as tourists wanting clean bathing water and as people making decisions about where to live. Young (2000) argues that while there is no direct causal link between public attitudes and the emergence of ecological modernisation, there is a symbiotic relationship between the two. For Young, post-material values helped sustain ecological modernisation once it became established and even helped accelerate its emergence.

Science and ecological modernisation

Ecological modernisation theorists have placed considerable importance on science as a central feature in environmental policy-making. Science has acquired, or some would argue appropriated the role of identifying environmental problems, setting priorities for the environmental agenda, such that some hold that society looks to science for solutions (Boehmer-Christiansen, 1994). In environmental conflicts in the late 1980s and 1990s science became far more politicised, as scientific experts made claim and counter-claim in a wide range of issues, including climate change, tropical deforestation and genetically modified crops (e.g. Demeritt, 2001). Science itself underwent a shift during this period, with a move away from reductionist science to a more integrated ecological perspective about nature. This new, more integrated science, promoted the concepts of multiple stress and critical load. For example, a combination of atmospheric pollution and climate change could act synergistically to affect adversely trees in urban areas. The argument here is that multiple stress is more serious than the effect of individual threats combined would suggest. For Hajer (1995) an important change resulting from these insights was the structural displacement of political decisions to non-political realms, such as scientific councils. For example, the scientific backwater of the Advisory Committee on Releases into the

Environment, which regulated biological pest control agents, such as using non-native ladybirds in glasshouses to control aphids, was suddenly pushed into the public sphere when asked to make decisions about the release of genetically engineered organisms. Yet, as Blowers (1997) stresses, the scientific community is also an interest group. While scientists may appeal to rationality, disinterested research and the pursuit of greater understanding, they are a part of society and are concerned with issues of funding, status and power. Moreover, there are concerns, even amongst scientists, about the ability of science to answer our ecological problems adequately (Place, 1996). But whatever the reservations, within government science and technology have come to play a more important role. Hence, agencies involved in licensing and regulation have increasingly needed a greater scientific understanding to enter into negotiations with business firms. For example, the Environment Agency has had to increase its knowledge of a wide range of industrial processes when in negotiations over BATNEEC (Best Available Technique Not Entailing Excessive Cost).

NGOs have also become more directly involved in science. As one illustration, Greenpeace in Europe has become involved in the development of hydrogen fuel cells and in developing Greenfreeze, a hydrocarbon based alternative to refrigeration using CFCs. Greenpeace in the UK is unusual in that it has its own laboratories, shared with the University of Exeter, to carry out data analysis. For most NGOs, a looser partnership, on a project-by-project basis, has developed with sympathetic scientists. One example of this is the work by a number of NGOs on the environmental threats of genetically modified crops. A number of university academics were employed to write proofs of evidence for the LL Chardon public hearings proposing changes to the national seed list (FoE, 2003a). This emphasis on science is part of the ecological modernist agenda, in placing new technology, research and the use of science as a central feature in the decision-making process. Those proponents of ecological modernisation in industry have also given as strong focus to the role of science, with a particular focus on the emerging field of industrial ecology.

Technology and ecological modernisation: the response of producers

Ecological modernisation, as presented in the first of Christoff's (1996) definitions, is closely related to research carried out in industrial ecology and soft technology. Indeed, the first issue of the *Journal of Industrial Ecology* noted that:

> ... it views corporate entities as key players in the protection of the environment, particularly where technological innovation is an avenue for environmental improvement. As an important repository of technological expertise in our society, industrial organisations can provide crucial leverage in attacking environmental problems by incorporating environmental considerations into product and process design. (Lifset, 1997, p1)

Industrial ecology can be defined as the attempt by some industries to turn waste and pollution into raw materials for their production processes (Bunker, 1996). Much of the research that has been carried out that focuses on these themes has been conducted in relation to industrial processes. This is seen in investigations that show companies can save waste and reduce their energy consumption, while cutting costs and reducing their environmental impact at the same time. Voluntary action can have other advantages, including minimising the future risk of economic and legal liabilities, making costly retrofits unnecessary and opening up new markets (Ekins, 1998). This movement is best exemplified by the Factor 10 Club, which was established at the Wuppertal Institute in 1994, which argues that by mobilising 'know how' to generate new products, new services and new methods of manufacturing, current resource productivity can be increased by a factor of 10 during the next 30 to 50 years (Chertow, 2000). In addition to potential cost savings from reducing waste and saving energy, economic benefits are claimed to be capable of being accrued from expanding technology exports. As other countries raise their environmental standards, market leaders in green products will be in a position to capture export markets for their products (Cohen, 1998). Elkington (1999), in a term now promoted by the World Business Council on Sustainable Development, advocates moves by companies to incorporate environmental concerns by considering their 'triple bottom line'. These bottom lines are their economic, environmental and social performance, which should all be considered together when evaluating a company's performance. Specialist consultancies, such as EcoSTEPS and SustainAbility, have established themselves as key advisers to companies who wish to develop triple bottom line accounting

methods. The main companies taking up this approach have been those in the oil, resource and utility sectors, in sectors that have a significant and visible impact on the natural environment.

Critical for understanding ecological modernisation are techniques developed in industrial ecology, such as life cycle analysis, that are beginning to be applied to components in house building, although these have not yet been applied to whole properties. The approach in lifecycle analysis is to take a consumer product and follows its environmental impact, from extracting raw materials, to processing and transport, to impacts during usage, and finally to disposal. In Britain, progress in industrial ecology is best exemplified by the ENDS report (ENDS, 2003). ENDS (Environmental Data Services) is a monthly report produced by independent publishers aimed at meeting the needs of environmental consultants and managers, policy-makers, regulators, lawyers, campaigners and lobbyists, but with a strong focus on issues of traditional environmental concern, such as energy and waste. Young (2000) gives numerous examples of how companies at different stages of a products lifecycle are taking steps to reduce its environmental impact. There are similarly many examples of higher environmental standards being introduced into manufacturing processes, as exemplified by paper manufacture that does not include chlorine bleach. Young (2000) also points to changing practices at other stages in a product's existence, including retailing, use and disposal. For example, the World Wide Fund for Nature set up a group consisting of DIY stores, furniture manufacturers and timber merchants in 1995 that commits members to use timber from sustainable sources only. These group members then put pressure on suppliers to ensure that they met Forest Stewardship Council standards for timber production. Schwartz and Gibb (1999) also highlights forestry as a key sector in which positive environmental action on the part of companies can be observed. He argues that the decision in June 1998 by MacMillan Bloedel, Canada's largest timber company, to end production by clear-felling was linked to pressure from customers with changing values. At the use stage there is similar evidence that chemical companies are becoming more concerned about the way farmers apply chemicals and pesticides. At the post-consumer (waste) stage companies are starting to take responsibility for their products at the end of their life; a good example of which is the Ontario Multi Material Recycling Incorporated (Young, 2000).

However, lifecycle analysis is not without its critics. Berkout (1996), for example, refutes claims that life cycle analysis is being pervasively internalised as an environmental management tool. As an illustration, work in industrial ecology, that sets out to promote 'organic' inter-linkages between companies, is at a much less developed stage than assumptions about the potential effectiveness of lifecycle analysis might suggest. Indeed, companies looking across their production processes to connect with other companies are rare. One commonly quoted example is of the Jyvaskyla saw mill in Finland (Korhonen et al, 1999). This mill provides waste wood to a power station, which then provides the whole neighbourhood with hot water and electricity. In a US context Kilbert and colleagues (2000) offers a further discussion on the potential benefits that an industrial ecology approach could bring to waste reduction and energy consumption. This is held to be achievable by the construction industry modelling its behaviour on natural systems, where sustainability is built in. But what prevents these examples of environmental technology developing being adopted more widely? Schwartz (1999) argues that companies are more ready to accept environmental responsibility where environmental damage is a side effect of the operations than if it is inherent in a business. In contrast, the main barrier according to Preston (1993) and Chertow (2000) is that there is a 'gap' in technological innovation, that is preventing more environmentally sympathetic technologies becoming mainstream. This gap is seen in government refusing to fund research and development because it is 'too applied' and industry refusing to fund research on technology because it is 'too embryonic' to adopt.

In addition to changes in particular sectors or firms, supporters of ecological modernisation point to macro-economic changes as evidence of ecological modernisation. They point to changes that have taken place in the structuring of the economy that have resulted in a decoupling of the relationship between primary resource use, including energy and economic growth. It was Janicke (1985) who first highlighted the role of macro-economic change, showing that in the Federal Republic of Germany there had been a de-coupling of the consumption of basic resources and growth in the GDP. Taking indicators of resources use – like crude steel consumption, weight of freight transport, energy consumption and cement consumption – Janicke showed that the GDP continued to rise after other variables began to fall in the 1970s.

For Janicke unintended environmental benefits resulting from macro-economic structural changes are an important aspect of ecological modernisation

Explaining the appeal of ecological modernisation to policy-makers

There are held to be a number of reasons why ecological modernisation appeals to policy-makers. In particular, when ecological modernisation is viewed as easing environmental problems, while economic improvements occur, the concept is seen to recognise the structural character of the environmental problematique, while assuming existing political, economic and social institutions can internalise care for the environment. In this regard, it is seen to be possible for existing institutions, including those of the state, to go through a process of institutional learning that leads to meaningful change as environmental concerns are internalised (Stewart, 1998). In recognising the structural nature of environmental problems, ecological modernisation moves beyond early attempts to protect the environment in the UK, such as the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act legislation that largely protected important wildlife sites from direct development pressure development, but not from agricultural intensification or unregulated leisure activities. An ecological modernisation approach to this problem would close legal loopholes, provide fiscal incentives for owners, but retain existing government structures, including a centralised government department, DEFRA, a non-departmental public body, English Nature, and local government structures. Unlike radical environmental critiques, this conceptualisation does not challenge the structures of government or trans-national companies. Rather the main obstacles to more effective protection are dilemmas of collective action. In effect the message is that ecological modernisation can work if everyone participates. As Gouldson and Murphey (1996) argue from this perspective, blame for the impacts of market and for government failure to protect the environment is more accurately ascribed to the failings of alliances between the common interests of industry and government that direct the formation of policy. Similarly, Porter and Linde (1995) argues that pollution itself is a form of inefficiency in production, creating negative externalities that the market system has until now been able to displace onto the public sector. The solution rests on finding solutions to these negative externalities. This interpretation thereby sidesteps calls for radical institutional reform, such as those called for by the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s. A further

reason for the appeal of the idea of ecological modernisation is an improved relationship between industry and government, which is to be less confrontational and more co-operative than in many previous post-war decades (Young, 2000).

Perhaps not surprisingly, therefore, the notion of a shared responsibility for the environment between government, business and consumers formed part of the EU fifth environmental action programme (European Commission, 1993) Indeed, the fact that ecological modernisation approaches have opened up a wide range of options for policy-makers is exemplified by the EU fifth environmental action programme. This goes further than regulation and economic incentives to promote voluntary mechanisms, provision of information, education and training, so extending the range of policy instruments considered appropriate in environmental protection. One of the reasons governments have embraced voluntary measures and economic incentives is to reduce the financial burden of large regulatory agencies. Apart from its ideological appeal, the practical policy changes that fit into this ecological modernisation approach are another reason for its popularity. These include a change from 'react and cure' policies to policies designed to anticipate and prevent environmental damage. Part of the appeal for a change towards a more proactive, rather than reactive, responses to environmental problems, was the high costs associated with a reactive approach. Two recent examples include the bankruptcy of firms and their insurers after health claims were made by those who had been made ill by asbestos, and the US efforts to clean contaminated land in the Superfund programme. The Superfund programme was established by Congress in 1980 in response to high profile controversies about contaminated land including those at Love Canal, New York. In 2000, after 20 years of this programme, more than 6,400 sites had undergone remedial work at a cost of $18 billion (Superfund, 2003).

Such changes only represent one of the forces that have promoted policy change in directions that can be interpreted as ecological modernisation. Also important are changes in government thinking that emphasise the need for joined-up thinking in policy-making. These have led, as one example, to pressure to address problems of displacement between air, water and land, as well as across space, by a more integrated regulatory approach. For example, if air pollution standards alone are tightened, then a company may be more inclined to alter production processes so it

can discharge more waste into a river. In the England and Wales attempts to address this issue were made by combining regulators for air, land and water into a single Environment Agency. Another attempt to develop a combined environmental policy approach is the development by the main government agencies with environmental responsibilities of Natural Capital (later renamed Quality of Life Capital) as a policy tool (English Nature, Countryside Agency, Environment Agency & English Heritage, 2001). In this document the agencies tried to create a framework for decision-making that spanned the main sectors of government environmental responsibility. The Natural Capital approach represents a hybridised mix of earlier conservation approaches with a more business-friendly approach to the environment and development. According to the Natural Capital approach 'critical environmental capital' are environmental features for which damage would be serious and irreversible. This provides an intellectual justification for protecting existing areas and designating new areas of irreplaceable environments such, as ancient woodlands. From this perspective, 'non critical' countryside features should be fully compensated through environmental enhancements. For example, if part of a country park is to be removed through building a road, new area of country park should be designated of equal size and quality. Yet a major concern with this approach is that poor quality habitat creation or enhancement schemes would be put forward by developers. These could act as 'Trojan horses' to justify the loss of environmental features. However, despite initial enthusiasm by the agencies, there remains little evidence that Natural Capital has taken hold in the wider field of environmental policy-making.

In conclusion, there are a number of financial and ideological reasons why ecological modernisation appeals to policy-makers. Its acceptance in the UK has been mixed, but has included the development of the Natural Capital approach and the formation of the Environment Agency. It is this acceptance in the UK, in comparison with the rest of Europe, that the chapter now turns.

Acceptance of ecological modernisation in the UK compared to other countries

What evidence is there that policy shifts have occurred in the UK that correspond to ecological modernisation? One of the clearest examples of the UK adopting policy measures that correspond to ecological modernisation can be found in the Integrated Pollution Control Regulations that were adopted in the Environmental Protection Act

in 1990. These regulations require a range of prescribed processes to apply the best available techniques not entailing excessive cost (BATNEEC) in pollution prevention and control. This technique is applied across a range of media – soil, air and water. Over 2,000 of the most important industrial processes in Britain are currently regulated under these Integrated Pollution Control Regulations. This policy is delivered by a close working relationship between the regulator, the Environment Agency, and the company being regulated. For the regulator this leads to a detailed understanding of process design, operation and management. Gouldson and Murphey (1996) argue this has led to a regulatory process that secures maximum reductions in emissions and reduces the risk of major pollution incidents. For most companies the regulatory process has resulted in costs in the short-term but in the medium-term it has given significant improvements in strategic decision-making, operating efficiency and the management of risk. Integrated pollution control only applies to major industrial processes, including energy production, processing metals, the chemicals industry, pulp and paper production, textile treatment, tanning, food production and the intensive rearing of poultry and pigs. Despite its apparent success with the regulated and the regulator, the principles of Integrated Pollution Control have not been applied to other sectors and processes, such as house building. Gouldson and Murphey (1996) argue that a mixture of legislative and cultural inertia is preventing the government from replicating the principles of Integrated Pollution Control in other areas. How can this reluctance on the part of the UK government be understood?

The majority of the research looking at the acceptance of ecological modernisation has been at the level of the nation state, with research by Janicke (1995), Anderson (2000), Cohen (1998) and Weale (1992) investigating acceptance of ecological modernisation by policy-makers in different developed counties. This is important for this thesis for two main reasons. Firstly, despite the rhetoric about ecological modernisation at the EU level, and in the secondary spheres of policy-making, it is important to appreciate the acceptance of ecological modernisation by the UK government. The UK government has a direct role in setting environmental standards for housing through building regulations, and an indirect role through planning policy guidance notes, which provide a policy framework for local government. Ecological modernisation cannot filter down from the EU level, through the national level to the local level if the national level does not accept ecological modernisation. Secondly,

the way in which local government in Bedfordshire has embraced ecological modernisation is an important issue for this thesis. The kind of factors that affect national government acceptance of ecological modernisation may also be significant at the local level.

In this context, it is worth noting that Janicke's (1995, in Spaargaren et al, 2000) explanation of why some countries are more successful in environmental policy than others sees this as being dependent on four variables: problem pressure; consensus ability; innovation capability; and strategy proficiency. Problem pressure is mainly a question of economic performance. Countries with adequate economic performance are often willing to pay for environmental protection but are usually subject to heavier pollution loads. Countries with poorer economic performance, which give less priority to pollution control, usually produce fewer emissions per capita. The second of Janicke's variables is consensus ability, where he argues that countries with neo-corporatist structures have policy styles that are more open to new interests and ideas. He gives the examples of Sweden and Austria, where high levels of environmental performance have been achieved by a consensus-seeking approach to decision-making. The third variable, institutional innovation capacity, reflects how policy styles become institutionalised over time. The institutional innovation capacity is both a function of the state and of market intuitions, which together determine openness to new interests in the media, the political system, the judicial system and the economic system. The fourth important variable for Janicke is strategy proficiency, which he interprets as the ability of institutional agents to implement policy. Environmental policy requires resources, such as administrative organisations, programmes, plans, financial resources and staff. Access to resources is an important consideration in the ability of institutional agents to implement policy. However, as Anderson (2000) notes, a country may be progressive in some areas of environmental policy but poor in others. For example, Japan has the best track record on air pollution of any OECD country but a poor record on water pollution. In addition, a government ministry may be fairly open to achieving consensus with some actors, such as business or labour groups, but less concerned about consensus with environmental NGOs (Anderson, 2000).

In contrast with Janicke, Cohen (1998) places greatest emphasis on access to science and technology, arguing that ecological modernisation is technological intensive. Countries with a weak commitment to science, or forms of environmentalism that are sentimental, are unlikely to muster enough public support to make the societal adjustments necessary to launch themselves on an ecological modernisation trajectory. Cohen bases these assumptions on the findings of the Eurobarometer and World Values surveys. He argues that the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries are the most culturally disposed to move in an ecological modernisation direction. The Eurobarometer and World Values surveys point to a situation in the UK of significantly weaker commitment to science and to sentimental forms of environmentalism, which are not prevalent in the Netherlands or in Scandinavia.

The view that the UK has not been as ready to carry out practical action to promote ecological modernisation as some West European countries has also been considered by Weale (1992). He asserts that professional expertise is central to the environmental policy-making process, but that the character of that expertise varies from country to country. In UK environmental policy, natural science expertise has dominated much of the policy-making process. Natural science expertise is inclined more towards hypothesis testing and confirmation than to devising practical solutions to politically determined problems. Acid rain provides a good example of this. In the UK considerable effort was put in to research to show there may be other causes of acidification than coal fired power stations, such as land use change, and that the problem was not as bad as environmentalists and other govenments claimed. Investment was not put into developing cleaner coal technology or other clean energy sources. Another reason proposed by Weale that the UK has been slower to make progress with ecological modernisation strategies is that uniform emission limits are not a commonly used regulatory method. Uniform emission limits are more likely, according to Weale, to result in companies investing in research and development to raise environmental standards than an environmental quality objective approach. An environmental quality objective approach is where standards are set for particular mediums, for example the amount of certain chemicals permitted in a river or pollutants in the air. Therefore, in an area with few other industrial processes, an individual plant could emit high levels of pollutants under an environmental quality approach. However, Weale appears to contradict most other ecological modernisation

proponents who advocate the abandonment of standard limits and the benefits of negotiated targets. The third important feature in Weale's research identifies two opposing coalitions in relation to air pollution; a clean air coalition and an economic feasibility coalition. As Weale explains, in Germany a split occurred within the economic feasibility coalition between those for whom the new environmental regulations would be more costly, and those who stood to gain from selling pollution control equipment. Weale asserts that this split has not occurred to the same extent in the UK. However, there is a weakness in Weale's argument here, as he does not address why this split has not occurred. Certainly, no research has been carried out to see if environmentally-based splits are occurring within the UK house building industry.

Ecological modernisation as a ploy and the role of NGOs

NGOs and ecological modernisation

Environmental NGOs are identified in this research as one of the key groups of actors with the potential to influence environmental standards in new housing developments. In Chapter Six the acceptance of ecological modernisation by NGOs and their influence in raising environmental standards in new housing will be addressed. Significantly here, according to ecological modernisation theorists, a new role has emerged for environmental NGOs, although the role played by NGOs in affecting policy is contested by social science researchers (Dryzak, 1997). Even so, for Mol (1999) ecological modernisation has resulted in dramatic changes within the environmental movement, resulting in increased legitimacy, increasing membership and increasing influence in the core domains of decision-making. This positive view is endorsed by Rutherford (1999), who goes as far as arguing that ecological modernisation could be a means of enhancing of citizenship and democratic participation through a revitalisation of civil society and the public sphere. Central to this suggestion is the understanding that the political issues raised by ecological modernisation go beyond economic and narrowly ecological considerations. This arises because some versions of ecological modernisation emphasise partnership and how partnerships produce enhanced opportunities for NGO involvement. This is illustrated by the many institutions that have adapted working practices by setting up stakeholder forums. In other instances new structures have emerged, such as waste

forums, green business organisations and round tables, based around different issues and geographical scales. These partnerships, round tables and opportunities for consultation provide new opportunities and new ways of working for NGOs. It is notable here that some leading UK NGOs have overcome their reservations about ecological modernisation and undergone significant shifts in policy. For example, in 1995 Friends of the Earth produced a report *A Superficial Attraction: The Voluntary Approach to Sustainable Developmen* (FoE, 1995), which was critical of an ecological modernisation approach to environmental policy-making. The report highlighted key areas where the approach was deemed to have failed to deliver genuine environmental benefits, including in the packaging industry, in industrial energy conservation, in habitat depletion and over ozone depleting chemicals. This argument was linked to the call for greater regulation to promote innovation and create a level playing field for companies, preventing some from getting a 'free-ride'. However, by 2003 Friends of the Earth (FoE 2003 b) was embracing corporate partnerships and the voluntary, market-led approach, as seen in the domestic electricity supply sector, where the organisation is working in partnership with companies like Unite–e to promote green energy.

But this vision of enhanced accountability and widening participation is challenged by others, who hold that some new consultative bodies, especially at the national level, are neo-corporatist. This argument points out that consultative bodies contain a limited number of actors, with only selected environmental groups acknowledged by the nation state (Leroy & van Tatenhove, 2000). Whichever is the case, a shift in NGO activities seems to be accepted by many mainstream NGOs, with both Hajer (1995) and Rudig (1988) noting a move among environmental groups from radical confrontation to a more practical policy-oriented approach. As the former Greenpeace chief Peter Melchett explained that Greenpeace's latest weapon was solutions enforcement. This meant pushing firms to adopt products that solved environmental problems but which were often suppressed, starved of investment or ignored. Melchett said that Greenpeace would increasingly use its campaigning muscle to ensure that certain businesses thrived and expanded. (*Financial Times* 26 September 1996). According the Hajer (1995), this view places environmental NGOs in the role of a counter-expert that presents alternative policy solutions. This potentially results in an image that NGOs have a more marginal policy-making role, as one of a series of

partners, which contrasts with the vision that they had a central role in earlier waves of environmental thinking, as expressed for example in the New Environmental Paradigm of Dunlap and Catton (1979). But as Buttel (2000), amongst others, has argued, these early phases in environmental social science research, represented by analysts like Dunlap and Catton, tend to overestimate the coherence of environmental movements, and exaggerate the degree to which environmental improvements came about from environmental mobilisation. For Buttel there is no clear association between environmental mobilisation and environmental legislation. Taking examples from the USA, he notes that virtually all landmark legislation - the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act and Endangered Species Act - were all passed in the early 1970s or earlier, before the environmental movement could be recognised as a potent political force. The best the growing environmental movement could do was to engage in rearguard actions to preserve as much of this legislation as possible.

Many critiques of ecological modernisation have emerged from commentators on the political left, who see a more central role for NGOs and are sympathetic to the modernist critique provided by sections of the movement. These criticisms tend to centre around the charge that there has been a reduction of moral and ethical arguments into financial and scientific factors; that the dominant role of already powerful groups in business and science has not been constrained; and that the importance of high risk but low probability events are being de-emphasised. A key underlying message in such critiques is that public policy (and that of corporations) is washing-over the real environmental problems that underlie 'modernisation' processes. In effect, that ideas on ecological modernisation do not acknowledge central features in Beck's (1992, 1995) work on reflexive modernity. Rather than what Beck sees as the institutionalisation of doubt and a disenchantment with science, public policy is charged with tending to assume that modernisation will bring environmental 'goods'. Thus, it is argued that the probability of a nuclear power station exploding is a low probability event but if it does occur it presents a high risk to human health and the environment but is sold primarily in government circles as offering environmental improvements compared to fossil fuel burning. Genetically modified crops and hormone disrupting chemicals that are produced in industrial

processes, including plastics manufacture, are similarly portrayed in positive terms by politicians and corporate interests. But for critics these new technologies are the environmental problem and not the solution.

Moreover, as Beck's (1992) reflexive modernity suggests, improvements to the operations of plastics plants to reduce the volume of hormone disrupting chemicals or a reduction in low level radioactive discharge from power stations, would not allay people fears about a possible environmental catastrophe. Also as Blowers (1997) argues, even if technological change came with widely recognised positive environmental impacts, such that ecological modernisation might be said to be taking place, this claim stands on uncertain ground since this interpretation fails to address the issue of high risk-low probability environmental problems. This raises the issue of the time frame over which processes that are claimed to be ecological modernisation are said to exist. Possible short-term enhancements will occur but these might be accompanied by longer term problems, or the displacement of problems from one geographical area to another. In this context, some analysts hold that claims about ecological modernisation cannot ultimately cover processes that could have global environmental impacts (Blowers, 1997).

In addition to the above criticisms, Pepper (1998) has a number of broad criticisms of much of the ecological modernisation literature. He views ecological modernisation as set of processes and perspectives whereby capitalism is currently trying to achieve its own version of sustainable development. In this regard, Pepper describes four key problems with ecological modernisation as an achievable ideal. Firstly, some environmental improvements come at the cost of displacing environmentally-harmful activities to newly industrialised and less developed countries. Secondly, neither the technological adjustment nor the policy discourse aspects of ecological modernisation necessarily diminish total resource consumption. This point is also raised by Christoff (1996) who is pessimistic about the opportunities that a narrow, industrially-focused ecological modernisation project would bring. He argues that such a programme would not necessarily lead to a reduction in total resource use or lead to the protection of unvalued non-resource related ecological concerns, especially if attaching an economic value to them is not straightforward. As one example of the kind of concerns, Christoff notes that, if motor vehicle emissions were cut per car by 10% but

the total number of cars on the road increased by 15%, this would not lead to cleaner air. Similar points were raised by Bunker (1996), who argued that evidence of a decoupling between wealth and resource use can be misleading. While many new industries, such as information technology are more profitable than tradition resource extractive industries, like mining, resource exploitation has continued or increased. Thirdly, ecological modernisation, as currently conceived, is only weakly ecological according to Pepper (1998). He sees ecological modernisation as economically reductionist, as it attempts to monetise the environment, which makes it dependent on technocratic elites. Finally, while some state and corporate advocates portray ecological modernisation as the only way to development and sustainability, Pepper holds that this ignores the diversity of possibilities raised by different cultures and divergent approaches to economic management. This view is echoed by Christoff (2000), who argued that positioning ecological modernisation as the next necessary, or even triumphant stage, in an evolutionary process of industrial development, seems to be offering a revival of mainstream development theory, which was subject to similar criticisms of euro-centrism. Theorists adopting this evolutionary view of ecological modernisation as the next stage of capitalism rely on simple notions of modern societies and traditional societies, ignoring development paths that differ from non-western cultures.

Harvey (1999), like Pepper, provides a green left critique of ecological modernisation. He sees ecological modernisation could represent an opportunity or a threat to the environmental movement. While it provides a common discursive basis for a contested rapprochement between the environmental movement and dominant forms of political and economic power, ecological modernisation also represents a threat to the environmental movement, as it presumes a kind of rationality that lessens moral arguments. According to Harvey, the assumed existence of ecological modernisation exposes much of the environmental movement to the risk of political co-option. Seen in this light, global environmental management for the good of the planet could be a convenient cloak around which to make claims on behalf of major governments and corporations for their exclusive and technologically advanced use of the world's resources. As such ecological modernisation represents for Harvey a discourse that can too easily be corrupted to enhance dominant forms of economic power. Viewed from this perspective, a future based on the limited forms of ecological modernisation

that are embodied in state and corporate messages could be one in which big business and big government, such as the World Bank and big science, dominate the world even more than they currently do. A similar view is expressed by Fudge and Rowe (2001), who examined the development of ecological modernisation in Sweden. They feel there is a danger that the advantages of ecological modernisation are increasingly vested in the knowledge classes, which emphasises divides within society and leads to a new technocracy. For Fudge and Rowe, the process of ecological modernisation has heightened tensions between top-down decision-making and the attempts to include bottom-up need, which remain unresolved by the Swedish government.

Sustainable development and ecological modernisation

So far I have outlined different conceptions of what analysts have seen the expression ecological modernisation to mean (along with some implications of the concept). In this section the tone of the commentary changes somewhat. Rather than highlighting what ecological modernisation is, this section seeks to make clear what it is not. In particular, the point that is made is that ecological modernisation is not the same as sustainable development. However, when the term sustainable development is used, there is also a lack of consistency about what it means. In fact, what can be meant by this term in official documents is at times more akin to ecological modernisation. Hence, the term sustainable development and its relationship with ecological modernisation needs exploration. First publicised in the World Conservation Strategy in 1980 (UNEP, 1980), a definition for sustainable development has proved elusive. As Murdoch (1993) describes, the literature on sustainable development is caught between high level generalisations and narrow technocratic concerns. This in many ways is similar to the ecological modernisation literature, in that it can either focus on changing industrial processes or on reflexive changes in society. There is little between the scale of an individual factory and the global biosphere. To be useful in practice, the idea of sustainability must apply to all spheres of human activity. But, as Redclift (1987) pointed out, there is a need to address the political and economic forces that lie behind unsustainable development, with the failure of these being the principal shortcoming of the World Conservation Strategy. Despite the disagreement and debate in academic circles sustainable development as a single canonical statement that occurs in almost all UK government policy documents at all levels.

Taken from the Brundland report 'Our Common Future' (WCED, 1987) it describes sustainable development as development which meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This notion of need is a strong element to the sustainable development debate, but is not considered in the ecological modernisation literature. Of course some basic needs are uncontested such as food, shelter and clean water. Others such as the need for a washing machine, refrigerator or television can be contested. Ecological modernisation would not consider whether an item met a human need but simply consider the 'greenest' way to produce it. Similarly ecological modernisation bypasses the whole debate on inter-generational equity, and the ethical issues for overall resource consumption this raises.

To gain an understanding of the distinctions between ecological modernisation and sustainable development, what should be grasped first is the vision within which sustainable development thinking emerged. It is worth noting here Jamison and Baark's (1999) view that ecological modernisation is a separate phase in the environmental debate, in the same way as the resource issues of the 1970s are separate from sustainable development. However this chronological relationship between sustainable development and ecological modernisation is not discussed elsewhere in the literature. More commonly, they are seen as policy discourses that move in parallel and overlap. In defining sustainable development the constraints of resource use and ability of wastes to be assimilated into the natural environment define the outer limits of sustainability (Jacobs, 1991). As Jacobs outlines, it follows that ideas about the outer limits of sustainability stem from early work on agronomy and ecology. Here there was concern for many decades about the carrying capacities and recoverability of agricultural systems to disturbance. The positivist approach that underscores such work, especially in its emphasis on ideas like carrying capacities, has more recently been supplemented by the insights of commentators like Palmer (1990) and Lowe (1991, in Murdoch 1993), who have argued that changes in agriculture, forestry and energy systems cannot be understood effectively on their own but need to be set against corresponding shifts in values and attitudes. Thus, in his work on rural sustainability, Lowe stresses that these shifts in values will not take place simply at the individual level, but will be the outcome of institutional practice. It is here that ecological modernisation starts to move away from sustainability. As seen

in the writings of analysts like Hajer (1995), ecological modernisation emphasises that existing institutional arrangements can be retained and environmental benefits can still accrue. Ecological modernisation as a policy programme can therefore be distinguished from the potentially more radical institutional changes that are implied by sustainable development. The idea that there can always be win-win outcomes is another key difference between sustainable development and ecological modernisation. Thus, Barbier (1987), in an influential early piece of writing on sustainable development, appears to reject the ecological modernisation approach and its potential for 'win-win' outcomes. He sees development as a trade-off between the three different elements of sustainability, arguing that any development process implies continuous, dynamic trade-offs within and between relevant overlapping sets of biological, resource, economic and social systems.

Despite these insights, there is little in the literature that explicitly explores links between the two concepts. Indeed, Pepper (1998) is one of the few authors who directly explores sustainable development and ecological modernisation. Pepper presents the view that ecological modernisation is the current alternative to sustainable development. In doing so, he explores internal contradictions within the sustainable development literature, including the differences between strong and weak sustainability and between ecocentric and homocentric approaches. An ecocentric approach centres around the environment independently of human values, while a homocentric approach centres around human needs and the uses the environment fulfils, such as providing raw materials, life support or aesthetic enjoyment. Pepper concludes that a homocentric strong sustainability (such as eco-socialism or social ecology) is the only real sustainability, and ecological modernisation is not sustainable at all. However, it is important to consider the suggestion that sustainable development and ecological modernisation are really at different points on the spectrum of green political thought. Indeed, sustainable development and ecological modernisation are more closely related than some ideas from 1970s radical environmental thinking (e.g. the Steady State economy) or 1980s deep ecology. Sustainable development still allows room in the debate for a pro-business perspective. Thus, Murdoch (1993) asserts that, by alluding to the possibility that development can be sustained, the term allows developers to feel that environmental

considerations may be accommodated within the development process. Here at least there is a clear link to ecological modernisation ideas.

Sustainable development and ecological modernisation in recent UK policy

Having considered ecological modernisation and sustainable development, this section will now consider whether key UK environmental policy documents, many with sustainable development in the title, are advocating sustainable development or promote ecological modernisation. The reason for making this specific point is related to the commentary that pervades national and local policy documents, such as local plans, that relate to housing. If policy documents mention the environment, they tend to allude to elements of the sustainability debate rather than to ecological modernisation. Similarly, local and regional levels of government in the UK are far more familiar with the term sustainable development than with ecological modernisation. Despite this, the sentiments expressed in policy documents are in most instances addressing environmental problems through ecological modernisation.

The first important document to consider in this context is *Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy* (HMSO, 1994). The UK government was one of the first to publish a national sustainable development strategy. This document represents official government policy towards the environment for much of my study period. Other more detailed documents, such as on housing provision, were expected to conform to this strategy. At 265 pages much of the strategy is organised as a review of policy areas - waste, transport, energy, forestry, agriculture and so on. In a document of this length there are inevitable contradictions and variations in tone. However, the overall message is of a policy discourse based upon ecological modernisation:

> A society which does not grow is one which cannot satisfy some of our basic human needs. 'Growth is the only evidence of life' Newman's quotation warns us against suggesting that we could promote the shrinking economy as a basis for sustainability. Economic development is just as important a concept as environmental protection, and we must find ways of achieving both together... Sustainable development does not mean having less economic development: on the contrary, a healthy economy is better able to generate resources to meet people's needs, and new investment and environmental improvements often go hand in hand. (HMSO, 1994, p5)

The clear message early in the document is that a win-win approach to environmental management is possible and desirable. Indeed, technological and scientific innovation are embraced as solutions to environmental problems:

> ... technologies are fundamental to sustainable development – whether applied to the design of environmental satellites, climate modelling, aerodynamic simulation of fuel efficient aircraft, energy efficient systems for the home or factory... (HMSO, 1994, p232)

The strategy is not surprisingly positive about the role of business in environmental management, consistent with ecological modernisation.

> ... companies are increasingly moving beyond regulatory requirements, anticipating the future direction of legislation and of market forces. They realise that controlling the pace of change themselves can be more efficient and economic than reacting to events. (HMSO, 1994, p213)

Even though there is no supporting evidence for claims that business is behaving positively, the essential message to grasp is the tone of the document, which accepts the key precepts of ecological modernisation, even if there is often a lack of detail on how policy aims will be realised.

We find similar sentiments expressed in the *Report from the House of Lords Select Committee on Sustainable Development* (HMSO, 1995). The Select Committee recognised that, despite government rhetoric, the slow introduction of 'polluter pays' measures meant that the emphasis in policy measures for sustainable development were still regulatory in nature. Yet there were still welcoming messages toward policy solutions in line with ecological modernisation:

> Environmental policies can generate net economic benefits, as was indicate in the earlier discussion of demand management. Many of the key measures in the climate change programme, for example, were designed to improve the energy efficiency of the United Kingdom economy and thereby to reduce the total resource cost of meeting energy demand... Similarly in transport Dr Goodwin suggests... 'there is a convergence between what is environmentally friendly and what is economically efficient'. (HMSO, 1995, p45)

Similar sentiments were embedded in *Indicators of Sustainable Development in the United Kingdom* (DoE, 1996), where the policy section of the document was fairly brief but confirmed that there had been little change in government priorities since the UK Strategy of 1994. The first indications of a shift in emphasis under New Labour came with the publication of *Sustainable Development: Opportunities for Change*

(DETR, 1998a). Here, ideas from ecological modernisation can be clearly seen in the discussion on sustainable goods and services

> We must aim for goods and services to be produced and used in ways which make efficient use of resources, and reduce pressures on the environment... we have to find ways to get more from less: so called eco-efficiency... There have been suggestions that over several decades we can halve resource use and double wealth, if we use technological innovation to use energy and materials four times as efficiently – the Factor 4 idea... areas such as information technology or biotechnology, are likely to offer substantial potential for eco-efficiency through new technology. (DETR, 1998a, p7)

The main shift from previous Conservative policies in this document are in the idea that everyone should benefit from economic development, while links between education, training and the environment receive more emphasis.

Further indications of New Labour thinking came in the *Sustainability Counts* consultation paper (DETR, 1998b).The ideology of this paper owes again more to ecological modernisation than sustainable development, as this section suggests:

> Cleaner growth for all is a matter of gain, not pain. Generating jobs and achieving prosperity in a way which uses energy more wisely, creates less waste and pollution, and is fairer to all in society is something which can benefit everybody. Developing the economy and protecting the environment can go hand in hand. (DETR,1998b p1)

These ideas were then formalised in the main policy document from Labour on sustainable development - *A Better Quality of Life* (DETR, 1999) - which was a replacement of *Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy*. In 2003 this is the current policy statement on sustainable development, with strong ecological modernisation messages embedded in the document, including support for voluntary agreements, ecological tax reform (e.g. an increased landfill tax), and using information and education as environmental policy tools. In contrast with the so-called sustainable development strategy it replaces, there is a greater focus on environment as 'quality of life' and with making links between the environment and other policy areas, particularly health and social inclusion. So, while earlier policy documents are largely confined to environmentally sensitive technology change, later documents incorporate a broader range of policy instruments and, consistent with an ecological modernisation approach, present alternatives to traditional government regulation. The extent to which these have been implemented across sectors and spatial scales is however a matter for debate.

Conclusion

Ecological modernisation and spatial scale

The impact ecological modernisation has on the spatial scale at which environmental problems are addressed is the main issue of concern for this conclusion. Spatial scale is important because the environmental issues associated with housing developments can impact on a wide range of scales, from the local to the global. If ecological modernisation promotes the prioritising of environmental issues at certain spatial scales, what impacts could this have on decision-making at other levels? For Hajer (1995) the environmental debates of the 1990s focused on problems that were different in terms of scale and time, with global environmental problems taking precedence, while regional and local problems were downgraded. If Hajer is correct, this could lead to an emphasis on the contribution of housing to global problems, such as to greenhouse gas emissions, with other issues receiving less attention, such as impacts on county wildlife sites. However, for Harvey (1999) a side effect of ecological modernisation has been a shift to the view that environmental management is longer the exclusive provenance of governments or the nation state. Instead, it points to the need for strong inputs from international organisations and local actors. Hence, a diversity of spatial scales are relevant for understanding environmental issues. Partly linked to this, Mol (1996) views ecological modernisation as a process in institutional reflexivity and the transformation of society. Initially modernisation lifted social relations out of local places and traditional structures, so a process of disembedding took place, in which the economic sphere became increasingly independent (cf. Hardin's, 1968, the tragedy of the commons). For Mol, what ecological modernisation theorists seek to restore is balance between nature and modern society by re-embedding economic practicalities, which occurs processes of production and consumption are analysed, judged and designed, from an economic and an ecological point of view. This spatial re-embedding is very different from the geographical remoteness described by Hajer.

For both proponents and critics ecological modernisation has acquired an air of inevitability. As Blowers (1997, p867) argues:

> Given the remarkable adaptability and persistence of the state and market powers, a gradual transition in the direction of ecological modernisation appears to be the most likely direction for change, at least for the foreseeable future.

Subsequent chapters will address the extent to which different actors accept the key precepts of ecological modernisation. These chapters will explore whether ecological modernisation is bringing about substantive changes in housing development. If substantive change is not occurring and ecological modernisation only influences a narrow range of environmental issues, the reasons for its partial influence will be explored. One possibility is that no substantive change is occurring in new housing development. If this is the case, then this would suggest that, for housing at least, ecological modernisation is a concept with strong propaganda appeal but with little substance on the ground.

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Chapter Three

Green housing

This chapter examines the environmental impacts of residential development in three main ways. Firstly, there are decisions about the location of a development. What qualities of location make it more or less environmentally damaging? For example, is the area of land to be developed of high wildlife value, or adjacent to land of high wildlife value? Is the land prone to flooding and could development on the land lead to flooding elsewhere? Is the development within an existing settlement, on the edge of an existing settlement or a free standing new development? These questions are important because they could affect the resources needed to put infrastructure in place and could influence the reliance of residents on cars for shopping, leisure and employment related journeys. Location is therefore more than a question of greenfield versus brownfield sites, even if we assume that there is clarity over what greenfield and brownfield actually mean.

Secondly, there are impacts associated with the layout of a development. Layout has an important role to play in determining the number of car-based trips compared to trips on foot or by bicycle within and beyond a development. Density levels in developments and road layout have an important impact on the viability of any public transport infrastructure. Layout is also important in preserving existing features, such as trees and hedgerows, within a development and creating new features, such as ponds, to naturally manage surface runoff. Layout has further impacts on energy efficiency, for example by designing houses that are aligned to make best use of passive solar energy.

Thirdly, is the environmental impact of an individual house. When most writers talk about green housing it is this third aspect that receives most attention. This includes the energy efficiency and water efficiency of a house. Recently there has been increased interest in construction waste and embodied energy in construction materials. This chapter will not address environmental concerns associated with materials that are used in the 'decoration' of new houses, such as paints or domestic

appliances, in part because no interviewee raised these as issues, and because investigating these products represents a field of study that could be a research project in its own right

In some ways the development of greener houses has much in common with the development of other green products and important lessons can be drawn from the wider literature about green design. Here Dewberry (1996) categorises different approaches to environmentally responsible design as 'green design', which focuses on one or two aspects of a product, 'Ecodesign', which refers to a comprehensive lifecycle strategy, and finally, 'sustainable design', which moves beyond the current context of design questions to examine need, value and ethics in product development. For example, in green design there may be a focus on mainstream areas of environmental impact caused by the product, such as improving energy efficiency or recycling more materials. The green design approach can lead to a redesign of a product but will not challenge underlying assumptions, such as the demand for a product. In contrast, Ecodesign takes a more holistic approach to green design. This would involve lifecycle assessment, where the environmental impact of each stage of a product is assessed, from raw materials through to end-of-life disposal. This form of lifecycle assessment forms the basis of some green certification schemes, such as Eco-homes. However, the lifecycle analysis only refers to components of a new house, not the complete product. Sustainable design in contrast represents a challenge to current industrial and social infrastructure. It includes concepts like de-materialisation, achieving more with less and emphasises services rather than ownership. In the book *Green Buildings Pay* by Edwards (1998), he gives examples of Ecodesign or even a sustainable approach resulting in low energy offices and teaching facilities that have been built, and are delivering higher environmental performance. However, in a recent residential assessment of environmental conscious house building, White (2002) shows that many projects are very small-scale, including one-off houses designed for the owner, projects in rural areas bogged down in planning controversy, and a focus on renovation and conversion rather than new build.

As a further word of caution, it should also be recognised that the environmental impact of a dwelling over its lifetime depends on how it is used and how consumer activities mesh with a dwelling's location, design and construction. Higher levels of

insulation could lead to hotter houses rather than more energy efficient houses. Consumers may choose not to use green features, such as cycle routes or space allocated for the storage of recycled materials. As explained in the Introduction, it is not the aim of this research to produce a quantitative assessment of the environmental quality of new developments taking place in Bedfordshire. However, this review of the main environmental issues associated with residential development is important in relation to later chapters about individual actors, where some issues receive considerable attention while others are almost completely overlooked. There, the issues addressed are those that have come to the fore as important in a Bedfordshire house building context. In this chapter the focus is on providing a sense of the range of issues that could have arisen in the empirical analysis. Hence, within this chapter, the environment is interpreted in a broad sense, to include issues that can only be assessed qualitatively, such as landscape quality. In doing so it is recognised that there are also important overlapping interests between environmentally sound developments and developments that do not adversely affect the health of occupants. It is also acknowledged that the environmental impact of a residential development may take place at a number of geographical scales. Development on a wildlife site is obviously a local concern but may have wider implications for the future viability of a species. Traditionally, land-use planning system concerns have focused on issues of local amenity. These traditional issues are defined in *Planning Policy Guidance 1* (DoE, 1992). These are also drawn on, though not so specifically defined in the revised PPG1 in 19997 (DoE, 1997). Again despite adopting some of the language of sustainable development this sees a focus on amenity issues of design, preservation of this historic environment in urban areas and conserving the special qualities of rural areas Other environmental issues, many of which have a long tradition in the environmental movement, are new for the planning system, including global warming and the consumption of non-renewable resources. An issue the planning system has yet to deal with effectively is the displacement of environmental impacts. Environmental impacts can be displaced producing local and regional problems in another locality, for example in the import of tropical timber.

Reflecting on what constitutes a green house forces architects, planners, academics and pressure groups to consider a particular vision of the future. For some researchers

a lack of greenness can be resolved by better project management, for example for Rwelamilia and associates (2000, p40):

> ...Careful siting and design of buildings, prudent choice and efficient use of building materials, re-use and re-cycling at all stages and the use of water and energy efficient building techniques and elements, as well as adequate maintenance and operation. As in many other sectors, solutions lie in cleaner production approaches, ecoefficiency, new technologies and new management practices and tools.

There are strong elements of ecological modernisation in many of these visions of green dwellings. While borrowing language from ecology, there is considerable faith in technological development as a solution for environmental problems. For example, a contemporary approach to design that is based on life principles, and which contributes to an understanding of the holistic nature of ecological architecture, is baubiologie or building biology, the science of holistic interactions and relationships between life forms and the built environment (Fowles, 2000). Building biology aims to create a healthy living, working and cultural environment, by methods that minimise the impact of a building on the health of people and the health of the planet. Building biology views the building as an organism with its surface as the third skin of occupants. For a building to be healthy it should behave like a skin and function naturally by breathing, absorbing, insulating and allowing evaporation. As the influential architect Lord Rogers stated in his 1991 book *Architecture: A Modern View* (p59):

> Technology will offer us more control rather than less. The buildings of the future will be more like robots than temples... Future architecture will be animated by a holistic ecological view of the globe. Non-mechanical it will be seamless and self regulating, programmed by electronic and bio-technical means to interact with users and the environment.

A similar approach is adopted by Simos Yannas (1996), who argues that there is a need to design buildings with a minimum dependence on fossil fuels, whether in embodied energy or operational use. For Yannas, the form and elements of a building can be made to respond to natural cycles, both daily and seasonally, and to exploit ambient energy sources and sinks. This shift is to be achieved according to Yannas by 'shared science', described as what is known about the geophysical environment, climate and ecology to accomplish a purposeful effect.

Similarly seeking environmentally sounder results from house building, Smith and colleagues (1998) view the approach to more sustainable housing as being through the use of local materials. Such materials are held to be easily accessible, reducing pressure of transportation of goods by roads and cutting carbon dioxide emissions from transport. Local materials are also enable consumers to be more accountable. Because current house building material is often produced at some distance from its use, the consumer has no idea about the scarcity of the resource or of environmental impacts associated with its extraction. Local reliance should encourage more responsible use. Added to which, local materials can more easily be assimilated into the landscape and existing vernacular architecture (Fairlie, 1996). As Pagani (1999) points out, indigenous buildings have evolved slowly and incrementally to better fit local environments. By contrast, the separation of the designer from the building process has created dwellings that are maladapted by being wasteful of resources, awkward in their context and harmful for community health and well being. Such advocates of the new vernacular point to the success of green housing demonstration projects of houses that have been built with materials that are not used by mainstream developers, such as straw bales or rammed earth. Such methods have attracted interest because they are inexpensive, easy to use, and environmentally responsible. In addition to which, such buildings are not associated with the 'over-engineering', as Jackson and colleagues (2002) argues many modern houses are . She holds that foundations for a family house to a depth of 90cm of concrete are unnecessary, with a more environmentally sound technique being the use of stone fascine. This has been used for church foundations that have stood for over 800 years In Bedfordshire local traditions are described by Meadows (1996). The local vernacular for the south of the county was for flit and hard chalk (also called clutch), in the northwest rust brown sandstone or ironstone from the greensand and cream-grey limestones exposed by the river were the main building stones. Timber and plaster were mostly used on the north uplands. Brickearths from clays which form soils in much of the county were used to for local bricks including all shades of red, yellow, purple grey and blue. These expressions of support for vernacular architecture are in contrast to how little they have touched mainstream building schemes.

The Location of Developments

New developments could be located anywhere along a wide continuum of settlement sizes. At one extreme there is dispersal into hamlets and villages, while at the other extreme is concentration into cities. The aim of town planners has been to concentrate new developments, including residential developments, in larger settlements with a range of goods and services to minimise the need to travel. Policies in structure plans and local plans, which highlight key villages or promote urban extensions as the most suitable location for new residential development, are based on this approach. Modern advocates of building in larger settlements form a body of researchers that can loosely be grouped as 'urban revivalists' (e.g. Elkin & McLaren, 1991; Sherlock, 1991). Research that underpins much of their work is in the transport and energy fields. Those concerned with environmental issues favour travel by public transport in preference to the private car for several reasons. On a per passenger kilometre basis rail and bus travel are more efficient than private cars. They also have lower indirect energy costs from activities such as vehicle manufacture and maintenance. Rail and bus options are also more efficient in land- take, as a car requires nine times more road space per passenger than a bus (Howard, 1990). One example of evidence along these lines has been provided by Banister (1980). His analysis of travel survey data from six parishes near Oxford stands out from many other investigations as he includes non-work trip data, that can account for over a quarter of all journeys. He found that the largest town, Henley, had the greatest number of trips, but more of these were on foot, giving the lowest energy consumption figure per person of the six parishes. The least energy efficient settlement was Ewelme, which had a low population density, limited facilities and poor public transport. Intermediate-sized settlements showed travel and energy consumption figures between those of Henley and Ewelme. The quality of services - presence of doctors' surgeries, schools, food shops and the quality of public transport - accounted for some variability between settlements, showing that more than size is important. Settlement demographic structure was also important, with households with more residents under 15 years of age making more trips. Hence, the links between settlement size and energy consumption are not linear. Yet research of the population threshold required for a service continues today (e.g. the Williams, 1999, examination of population thresholds for 13 services in Gloucestershire, which found a distinction between

services in settlements of under 5,000, such as convenience stores, financial services, garages and pubs, and those found only in larger settlements). Such insights are of direct interest to this research, for extra residential development can be held (by developers and planners) to make settlements big enough to support new facilities (such as a leisure centre).

But Green (1971) highlights inconsistencies from this approach to spatial planning. For one, planning departments define critical thresholds at quite different sizes, with key village policies working on figures from 500 to 8,000 inhabitants. It is also the case that one of the limitations of debates on the location of new development has been a reliance on statistical averages across wide ranges of settlement types. Yet, as Birley (1983) has shown, where a development is located in relation to the rest of a settlement is also important, for when a similar residential development is located in town, rather than out of town, energy use can vary by 100 per cent. Further signifying the absence of simple relationships, reference can be made to the Hedicar and Curtis (1995) study of five residential estates in Oxfordshire with similar socio-economic profiles (young affluent households with high car ownership). Here remoter settlements and those without services were again found to be associated with more car travel. Yet residents of the estate in Bicester were an anomaly, for although they were physically part of the town they did not seem to be psychologically part of it. Their closeness to the M40 motorway was associated with these residents being more footloose, so the local town did not benefit from their patronage as much as might be expected. This point links to Owens (1984a) argument that it is not possible to identify intrinsically energy efficient land use patterns, for the efficiency of different spatial configurations depends on the premium placed on choice of jobs, propensity to travel and the extent to which cars are used.

This point suggests that a 'rigid' allocation of housing to settlements of a particular size might not be justified. This fits with an approach to housing development that favours steering new dwellings toward places with spare capacity in their infrastructure (see Moseley, 1974). One exposition of this is Green's (1971) idea that economic infilling could be a guideline for village planning rather than physical infilling.

Yet more recent government thinking has tended to underplay this approach to housing location:

> Urban extensions and new settlements must consume some greenfield land. Assuming that these two types of development are at the same densities, the only difference in land consumption is likely to result from different levels of amenity and service provision, and land taken for off-site infrastructure. Because urban extensions may be able to make use of existing services such as schools, libraries, doctors, etc. they may need less additional land for these functions compared to new settlements, although the area involved is minimal. Even this advantage will disappear with very large urban extensions, where a full range of new services is likely to be needed... The impact of off-site infrastructure is likely to be significantly different: urban extensions will utilise existing capacity in roads and drainage, and any upgrades required are likely to occur within the immediate vicinity of the existing infrastructure; whereas new settlements may induce the creation of new infrastructure into rural areas, requiring more land than that just taken for the settlement itself. Again, however, the land areas involved are likely to be minimal. (DoE, 1993a, p28)

The problem with this analysis is that land is considered to be the only resource that needs to be conserved. Materials, energy and waste from the construction of new facilities are not considered.

This point also has bearing for current debates over housing policy, which often centre around whether it is 'best' to develop new free-standing settlements, develop along transport corridors or allow urban extensions. The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) supports new settlements of at least 10,000 houses in agglomerations of 200,000-250,000 people, along strong public transport links. These settlements are favoured as they protect existing towns from being swamped by development, integrate development with public transport and allow co-ordination between social and market provision housing. However, nationally there is little appetite for new settlements as a strategic solution for new housing. Planning Policy Guidance 13 (1994) places new settlements at the bottom of the priority list for new housing. Large new settlements are viewed as potentially requiring substantial financial assistance, as they are too expensive for developers to support, which could divert public money from problems elsewhere. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) is scathing about the introduction of significant new growth points into the countryside. They argue that it is impossible to create a free standing new settlements in a densely populated country like England,

where motoring is cheap and people are willing to travel distances to shop and work. Opinion is also divided over the advisability of developing along transport corridors (Bate, 1999). The TCPA supports development on greenfield sites that are clustered, so as to provide high densities along public transport routes. However, CPRE and Friends of the Earth are sceptical about the scope for new developments around railway stations or reducing the environmental impact of developments by providing a more regular bus services in 'greenfield towns'. For the CPRE, organic growth in and around existing settlements is likely to perform better in environmental and other terms than scattered building new free-standing developments.

But while the main body of academic and practitioner opinion supports a degree of concentration within larger settlements, there are descenting voices. An alternative vision of low-density, dispersed living is proposed by eco-idealists. The picture of small-scale, self-sufficient communities repopulating the countryside, relying on locally grown food, ambient sources of energy and water, and linked to the global village through the Internet, is appealing to eco-idealists. While the idea that small is beautiful has a long history in the environmental movement (e.g. Schumacher, 1972), the current revival in interest was sparked by publications like Mollinson's guide to permaculture (1990). This has been articulated in the UK by the publication *Low Impact Development* (Fairlie, 1996) and more recent international publications, including *Eco-Village Living* (Jackson et al, 2002) and *Another Kind of Space* (Dearling et al, 2003). For Farlie, by giving people the opportunity to live in the countryside in low-impact dwellings, the planning system could create richer and more diverse rural communities. Similarly, Robertson (1990) argues for a decentralised future based on a return to the countryside and reviving rural values. There are several examples where this vision of an environmentally friendly, low density residential development have been implemented. Village Homes in California is a community where residents grow 90 % of their own food on communal land and every house is solar panelled. The ecological community of Halifax in Australia provides a good example of what can be done in a very suburban setting. In Sweden the suburb of Orebro has been developed with extensive measures for waste management, water management, composting, green shops and allotments (Gwilliam et al). This eco-idealist approach assumes that personal attitudes towards work and lifestyle will change in ways that promote self-reliance and small-scale economic

activity. But there are difficulties in maintaining such communities. This is illustrated by examples such as Whiteway in Gloucestershire, a Tolstoyan settlement of the 1900s, where the ideal of self sufficiency has evaporated, with households now having two or more cars and workers commuting to nearby towns. With restrictive covenants decaying in application over time, people's behaviour has tended towards societal norms (Barton, 2000).

But within national and regional policy contexts there is no serious intention to spread housing developments around villages and other sites outside urban areas. The building industry is certainly cautious about promoting development in the countryside but would like to see redevelopment of 'eyesores' in rural areas, such as airfields, hospitals and derelict buildings. The Housebuilders Federation has also argued that housing should be introduced into locations that already attract high levels of car journeys, such as business parks in rural areas. There is also support for more housing in smaller settlements from the Rural Development Commission (now the Countryside Agency), which believes that encouraging jobs, housing and services in rural communities could reduce the need to travel and enable those on low incomes to live in rural communities. However, signifying ongoing debates on this issue, for the CPRE there is no reliable connection between adding new houses and support for village facilities.

Moving one step down the spatial scale, much less has been written about site selection and the specific qualities of the site that make it more or less suitable for residential development. Yet site and location are not unrelated. Development interests, for example, are concerned that schemes are not delayed or additional unexpected costs incurred by the presence of protected species or archaeological remains, so site issues can lead to location changes. But while a number of publications are critical of proposals to develop on valued urban green spaces, such as parks and allotments (Elkin et al, 1991; FoE, 1997; Rudlin, 1998), they shy away from the issue of site selection in greenfield developments. While it seems clear that certain sites should clearly be avoided (Rydin, 1992), such as flood plains, aquifer recharge areas; and areas that contain rare species, it is not always the case that they are (e.g. Parker, 1995). It may also be the case that it is better to avoid developments within existing settlements, where a location could significantly reduce the energy

efficiency of the dwelling, for example by developing in a frost pocket or in a location exposed to high winds. So in conclusion, the primary factors that are considered in the green housing literature are transport in relation to location of new developments. As we shall see in Chapter Four, while transport is an important factor in the Bedfordshire context, issues that have received little attention in the academic literature, particularly the wildlife value of a development site and likelihood of flooding, are locally prominent issues.

The Layout of Developments

The analysis of residential layout involves a review of different theories of urban design or form (Goodchild, 1994). Urban form may be defined as the spatial configuration of fixed elements within a built-up area. This includes the spatial pattern of land uses and their densities, as well as the spatial design of transport and communications infrastructure. Urban interaction refers to the flow of goods, people and information between different city locations. From the perspectives of energy use, emissions from flows of people are most important, particularly from commuters and shoppers, although flows of goods can be significant. Theories of urban design have been criticised for dealing with the relation of people to places rather than people to other people. However, urban design theories do have strengths (Goodchild, 1994). They provide a means of visualising and reflecting on the physical objectives of urban planning. They can ask hypothetical questions about urban form .For example, what if urban areas were organised to save energy? They say little about the exercise of political power, about the role of institutional actors or planning procedures, and they can easily neglect economic questions, such as how dwellings are to be built and plans implemented. But they do provide one key message about desirable conditions for urban design, which is the need to increase urban density.

There are no standardised measures of density, with commentators referring to habitable rooms, dwellings, bed-spaces, and plot ratios. This variety can create confusion when comparing studies and developments. Some measures may even prove counter productive. Incentives to increase the number of habitable rooms may result in developers building large houses (Bate, 1999) Moreover, if a house is sparsely occupied, for example with few people in a big house, or only used for part

of the year, land and resource consumption per person may still be high. Despite such uncertainties, increases in density are seen as advantageous for a number of reasons. For one, low-density development makes greater use of land that could be used for agriculture, leisure or ecosystem functions, such as aquifer recharge. Secondly, there are energy savings in transport from higher density developments. At any given density level there are numerous different housing layouts possible, each with its own specific pattern of advantages and disadvantages. Although housing makes up the majority of urban land uses, this proportion decreases at higher densities, as the amount needed for schools, open space and other facilities depends on the number of people. The savings made by eliminating very low densities, below 20 dwellings per hectare and by raising densities from 20 dwellings per hectare to 40 dwellings per hectare will make more difference to the overall land take that a shift from 40 to 60 dwellings per hectare (Llewelyn- Davies, 1998)

In the USA urban sprawl and the environmental implications of low density development has become a research area in its own right. Environmental NGOs such as the Sierra Club (1999) and the Worldwatch Institute (2000) have both produced reports looking at this issue. Sprawl, as defined by the Sierra Club (1999, p1), is:

> Low density development beyond the edge of service and employment, which separates where people live from where they shop, work, recreate and educate – thus requiring cars to move between different zones.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (USHUD, 1999, p33) adds some definitional precision:

> ... a particular type of suburban development characterized by very low density settlements, both residential and non residential; dominance of movement by private automobiles, unlimited outward expansion of new subdivision and leapfrog developments of these subdivisions; and segregation of land uses by activity.

To this Downs (1998) adds that there is no low-income housing outside the core.

Various environmental impacts of urban sprawl have been identified by Johnson (2001), including: loss of environmentally fragile lands; reduced regional open space; greater air pollution; higher energy consumption; decreased aesthetic appeal of the landscape; loss of farmland; reduced species diversity; increased stormwater runoff; increased flood risk; excessive removal of native vegetation; and ecosystem

fragmentation. Johnson points to the fact that although the impacts of sprawl are numerous and seemingly straightforward to observe, they are much more difficult to measure.

In the UK, one of the most contentious issues related to sprawl is the greenfield land loss in the countryside. The CPRE (1992) suggests that the rate of rural land loss is about 11,000 hectares per year in the period (1945-1990) a figure twice that given by government statistics. The land under greatest development pressure is often of high agricultural value but it is often of poor ecological value. It is also the case that agricultural trends have increased yields, so less land is required to produce the same amount of food. However, any significant switch to more sustainable agricultural, as advocated by many environmental groups, may make some of this high quality farmland more important. For instance, organic farming makes less intensive use of chemicals but requires more land to produce the same crops as conventional farming. A related argument is that because of agricultural intensification, much farmland holds little value to wildlife, with the main threat to the countryside coming from farmers, not housebuilding (Hall & Ward 1998). But while national farmland losses may not be great in percentage terms, large areas of countryside are under much greater development pressure, as with Cambridgeshire, Essex, Kent and Hampshire. In these counties the percentage of rural land affected by housing development pressure is six times the national average (Rudlin, 1998). Set against these arguments, for some concern about development in the countryside is based on vision that the countryside is fragile and needs to be protected, and this vision needs to be challenged:

> Concerns about development within the greenbelt should be allayed by the fact that the untouched rural idyll is a myth. Rurality is a social construct this is historically dynamic. A rural utopia is unlikely and we all have different ideas about what the countryside should be. (Transport Visions Network, 2001, p66)

In spite of such reservations, a great deal of contemporary thinking promotes higher densities and locating development in larger urban areas. Yet, in Newman and Kenworthy's seminal *Cities and Automobile Dependence* (1989), they found a weak correlation between settlement size and energy consumed by travel, with a stronger correlation between density and energy consumed. This study found that density was

a more important predictor of energy use than important social variables, such as income. In sprawling settlements even low-income households are pushed into car ownership, whereas in dense urban areas high-income households may choose to be without a car. More recent UK research confirms these findings. One of the most influential of these studies was by ECOTEC (DoE, 1993a). They found that, at densities below 15 persons per hectare, car journeys make up 72% of all journeys and trip length is 35% greater than in settlements with of higher density. Llewelyn Davies and Barlett School (1998) likewise found that total distance travelled was lowest in areas with a density in excess of 50 dwellings per hectare, and that the lower the density, the less likely people are to walk to facilities and the higher the proportion of motorised trips. For example, if the catchment needed to support a primary school is 5,000, and 600 metres is the threshold for walking to school; then a gross density is needed of about 45 people per hectare if pupils are to walk to school (Barton, 2000); although such calculations raise questions about user choice, behaviour variation and the uneven distribution of facilities. Even so, the Local Government Management Board's Manual on sustainable development suggests that net densities of 100 persons per hectare are required to support a viable bus service (Robson, 1994); with both White (1995) and Addenbrooke (1981) arguing that contemporary densities are too low for efficient buses.

Yet, amongst those researchers who advocate higher densities, there is a lack of agreement about the implications for urban form. One influential document that promotes higher density living is Krier and Cusmano's (1973) *A Design Guide to Residential Areas*, which advocates settlements composed almost entirely of four storey flats, organised around broad avenues and squares. This approach has been elaborated by the Urban Villages Group (1992). But the historacist approaches advocated in Krier and Cusmano can be criticised for failing to address the increased cost resulting from the use of complex architectural details and unusual materials. Thus, Marcus and Sarkissian (1986) argue that historacist high density developments ignore consumer preferences for features like private entrances at ground level, private open space, a pleasant open aspect from windows and convenient car parking.

But supporters of high densities have shown an appreciation of the need to incorporate good layout features in their residential proposals. Thus, the Property Services

Agency (1988) has emphasised the importance of planting shelterbelts of trees against northerly winds. This can result in energy savings of 3%-5% and can make a significant contribution to the landscape. Layout and landscape design can be successfully integrated into the wider landscape through structure planting, shelterbelts, green wedges and green corridors. An additional function for structure planting and shelterbelts could be to provide a clear urban edge. To be effective shelterbelts should be fairly thick, around 10 metres and occur at regular intervals. They therefore occupy a considerable amount of space but have additional functions as wildlife corridors. The Property Services Agency (1988) criticised the form of many urban/rural green belt boundaries. Many urban areas have long, heavily indented urban edges, which promote rapid cooling of peripheral houses. Instead an urban containment policy should minimise the length of the urban periphery. It should also look to have land uses at the edge of the urban area that can reduce wind speeds, as with replacing grazing land with forestry. Using plant species that are common locally can benefit wildlife and reinforce the natural qualities of a place. But the building process can pose a substantial risk to existing landscape features, such as trees, hedges and ponds that could contribute to the environmental quality of the development. The manual *Landscapes for New Housing* (Baines, 1990) provides guidance on protecting existing trees and routing service trenches away from existing vegetation for example.

Another aspect of site layout that has both energy and wildlife implications is drainage. One possibility is to collect rainwater for uses where water quality does not matter, for example for watering plants. Good drainage can also prevent heat loss from evaporation, which on paths near dwellings can affect internal energy use. As impermeable surfaces in residential development increase runoff, this can heighten soil erosion, place pressure on drainage systems and disturb wildlife. Yet this environmental impact can be reduced by minimising hard surfaces and replacing them with mixed vegetation. There are also ways to conserve water and make more sustainable use of water pollutants. These can either be at the level of the individual house, or for an estate. Grey water from washing and surface water could be collected separately from sewage-contaminated water, as it can be re-used without treatment in many cases. Here the roof is generally the most effective method to collect rainwater. For a typical hard roof of slate, clay or concrete, losses due to evaporation are about

10%. Rainwater for external use can be stored in external water butts, Whereas rainwater for flushing WCs needs to be treated with a slow sand filter, which once in operation are easy to maintain. This only leaves the problem of sewerage disposal. One approach here is to use reedbeds to treat black water locally. This involves passing foul water through a succession of reed beds to turn it into water suitable for irrigation (Grant et al, 2000). The land take for such reedbeds is very small, requiring only about 2 square metres per person or about 2% of the housing area. Innovative site drainage can also make a contribution to energy production. Thus, one experimental project at the Energy Park in Milton Keynes has shown that a lake designed to store surface run off to also act as an energy store (Milton Keynes Energy Agency, 2003).

While this might come across as looking very positive, in practice, some environmentally features in layout can come into direct conflict. Making the most of passive solar gain is particularly problematic. Here, despite being the subject to a guidance note from the DoE as early as 1971, developers still build estates with the same style of house oriented in a variety of different directions. Small infill sites pose significant constraints from this point of view. The ideal solar design can also conflict with the desire to have footpaths and cycleways. Moreover, as densities rise, overshadowing becomes an increasing problem, with very high densities inhibiting design for passive solar energy capture. The key is whether the Winter sun, or at very least the Spring and Autumn sun, reaches ground floor windows. On flat land this means a maximum density of around 50dwellings per hectare (Turrent et al, 1981). But as most sites are not flat plains, using local topography can have an important role in energy efficiency, especially if chilling north and north-west winds can be avoided or dwellings can be clustered in sun pockets or find low positions along slopes. Even courtyard designs can help trap solar energy, provided the courtyard is the right size in relation to the height of buildings.

Other energy savings associated with higher densities that have received less attention are combined heat and power (CHP) and embodied energy. Rydin (1995) discusses at length the environmental benefits that many European countries achieve from CHP schemes. In CHP systems the heat produced during electricity generation is used for space and water heating. This increases the efficiency of conversion of coal or natural

gas to around 80%, compared with 38% in conventional power stations. This leads to a reduction in the environmental impact of each unit of energy delivered. Their viability is dependent on a compact, high density urban form. Thresholds of 50 dwellings per hectare have been suggested. Viability is dependent on the location of main users (i.e. a mixed use pattern), level of take-up by consumers and the competing costs of energy supply. However, district heating schemes have a poor record for reliability in Britain (Goodchild, 1994), although district heating has been successfully used at the micro-scale in residential development in Milton Keynes Energy Park. Here, more emphasis is on generating hot water, with the scheme in Milton Keynes that is attached to a block of 36 sheltered flats achieving 77% energy efficiency and selling surplus energy to the grid. Higher densities can also reduce energy use within buildings with a low surface area to volume ratio, such as flats. There are further advantages in terms of embodied energy, as with shared walls and shorter infrastructure lengths, so less building materials are needed (Wright and Gardiner, 1979). But high-rise buildings do not share these advantages. They involve high levels of embodied energy.

Despite the association of many environmental innovations with increasing settlement, there are minority of commentators who are critical of sustainability claims for greater densities. Some of these critics are sceptical that greater densities are taking place at all. There is very little systematic evidence to suggest that suburban intensification is taking place. The only concrete research about whether urban densification is in fact taking place in the UK is by Whitehand and Larkham (1991). They chart the changes in a low density suburban area into a medium density area. Other criticisms are made against the positive quality of life improvements advocates of high density living claims it can deliver. Critics of the move towards higher urban density are particularly critical of the single-issue (transport) focus of proponents of urban density. While current high density neighbourhoods do show lower levels of car use than those developed at a higher density many of these existing high density neighbourhoods are located near to city centres with a wide range of facilities in walking distance (Barrett 1996). Critics also argue that, while higher densities may reduce trip generation, they may have unintended policy consequences that outweigh benefits in terms of sustainability. Critics argue that the rationale for higher densities has more to do with national policy objectives like reducing emissions or protecting

rural land. When applied locally, these national goals can increases the volume of traffic and local air and noise pollution. Emissions may be concentrated in areas where they cause most damage and adversely affect the largest number of people (Barrett, 1996) Furthermore, there is a school of thought that low-density suburban living has desirable qualities, with McKie (1996) and Lowe and Petherick (1989) arguing that British aspirations are for a detached house in the country or suburbs rather than a city centre apartment. As Davie (1972) notes for the western United States:

> Southern California is the one place in the world where it is possible to see how the mass of people, given the chance to decide for themselves, really want to live. Largely because of modern technology, the majority of them have come to the conclusion they do not want to live in the city. Whole new communities in California are being planned, built and sold by private entrepreneurs on the proposition that escape for the anxieties of the times is not only desirable but possible. [These] Advertisements, typical of many illustrates the trend. 'Twenty years ago if you had wandered about this big and gentle valley, you'd have seen it dotted with great, gnarled live oaks, patriarchs of their kind. Whispering streamlets meandering their bright, aimless way through wide-stretched meadows. Grazing horses. Softly rolling hillocks and grassy landswells. All of it held in a protective ring of giant hills, under a sky so fresh you could almost see the other side of the universe. You can still see it, exactly the same, today. None of it has changed. Only now Westlake is here. A new kind of city. A different kind of city. What makes it different is that this city didn't push the country out of the picture. This city moved in carefully so it wouldn't disturb the centuries old beauty of the area. The city occupies eighteen square miles, with winding roads, neat groups of spruce and comfortable houses, and in the middle a home made lake of a hundred and fifty acres'.

While the purple prose here is not so prevalent for new housing developments in the UK, the benefits of lower density to 'preserve' landscape quality and to create a greener and more attractive urban environment are certainly present. This is particularly apparent in large urban extensions, such conversions of hospitals and old airfields to residential use.

In this regard the Town and Country Planning Association has remained largely faithful to the long standing Garden City tradition in British planning; for example, by advocating new settlements of lower density and resisting significant increases in density in existing settlements:

> No Town Cramming: However densification must be compatible with good urban quality. This will certainly mean the rigorous protection of urban green spaces. It may mean restrictions on the scale of higher residential densities; otherwise policies will be completely counter-productive, causing even more people to leave. (Hall & Ward, 1998, p151)

Arguments against town cramming are direct urban equivalents of objections to development in rural areas: loss of amenity, visual intrusion, loss of habitats, increased congestion, increased pollution and noise. Yet the urban protectionist lobby has been dormant compared to its rural counterpart, and only seems to have found a voice in the Town and Country Planning Association. Illustrative of the arguments made, in a TCPA report, Lusser (1991) stresses the importance of preserving gardens, verges and other green areas. Lusser argues that in urban areas verges and other small areas of greenery probably equal the total area of parks, and act as pollution filters and CO_2 absorbers, as well as havens for wildlife. In a similar argument of Farlie (1996), who advocated smaller settlements, Troy (1996) argues that lower densities are more sustainable than higher densities because they allow people enough space to produce their own food, manage household waste and live in a more personalised and sustainable way. For Troy, increased travel brought about by living at lower density could be offset by improved domestic energy efficiency.

Addressing transport claims in detail, Breheny (1995) argues that even if all the UK population lived at the densities of metropolitan areas, it would only save about 34% of the energy used in transport. This is not something even the most enthusiastic proponents of compact cities would advocate. A better estimate of the saving, Breheny argues, can be made from looking at rates of decentralisation over the last 30 years. If this had not taken place the energy saving would have amounted to just 2.5%. This, he suggests, is the most future urban containment policies are likely to achieve. However, given that the contemporary trend is for individuals to travel longer distances, and to travel more frequently, savings for the individual householder from the creation of compact, centralised urban areas may be insufficient to persuade them to give up preferences for suburban housing. Work by Owens suggests that in the medium term with people changing vehicles to save petrol in response to higher prices rather than being willing to accept loss of mobility (Owens, 1986)Another argument against a compact cities policy is that there has already been a shift towards

specialisation in services and commuting patterns have already substantially shifted to suburb to suburb commuting (Levinson & Kumar 1994, Gordon & Richardson 1989). This point is allied with claims by those like Muth (1984), that energy saving measures within the home are invariably more cost effective than moving home to reduce commuting costs. Rickaby (1987) has looked at these issues in relation to incremental developments within existing towns. He found there was little difference in energy efficiency between different policies for accommodating new development. However, the towns that he studied were already fairly compact and highly dependent on private car transport, so variation in the location of new development is unlikely to affect length of journey or mode of transport. So in conclusion, while there is some support for higher density development the scope of the savings made and particularly whether the house buying public will accept housing at higher density remains hotly debated.

The individual house

In the UK reduction of household energy consumption is seen as a key factor in stabilising CO_2 emissions. About 27% of the total energy consumption is within the domestic sector, which leads to a similar percentage of CO_2 emissions (Jackson, 1992). Space heating accounts for just over half of domestic energy consumption, water heating for about a third, with the rest for appliances and lighting. Setting energy efficiency targets in new homes has been part of building regulations in the UK since the 1970s. A major revision was carried out in the regulations in 1990, with the then Department of the Environment expecting this would lead to a 20% reduction in energy consumption in the domestic sector. However, by 1993 it became apparent that these changes in regulations had produced minimal results. A major problem with the 1990 changes was that they allowed developers to offset improvements in one area against another; for example, by increasing loft insulation and decreasing thermal efficiency in walls. This is a particular problem where improvements are expensive and technically difficult to retrofit, such as windows and walls. Under 1995 changes to the building regulations builders are not able to do this. The 1995 regulations produced a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP), where the overall energy efficiency of buildings is rated. The SAP rating is important because it is the key measure used in the UK by builders and by government to evaluate the efficiency of houses. The SAP gives buildings an energy rating from a low of 1 to high of 100 (now

120 in the 2001 version, but for this study the 1995 version applied). This energy rating is supposed to capture the energy efficiency of a house, including factors like thermal insulation in the fabric of a building, energy efficiency of heating systems, solar gain and ventilation, and the price of fuel. For new dwellings and conversions that create a new dwelling, a SAP rating of 60 is set as the minimum, with this increasing with the floor area of the dwelling. For example, a three-bedroom house will have a SAP target of 80.

Despite its almost universal use and legal status through the building regulations the SAP has been subject to criticism. For example improving regulations in new houses will take a long time to work its way through the system with only 1% of the total housing stock being replaced each year. Three-quarters of the current UK housing stock was built before the introduction of thermal energy regulations. Some argue that greater energy efficiency gains could be made by focusing on improving the existing stock, with an emphasis on new-build not addressing the needs of those on low incomes to access energy efficient dwellings. SAP has also been criticised for not providing a meaningful indication for householders of their energy use, for SAP does not take account of household size or composition, which have a major impact on energy consumption (for such criticisms see Bhatti, 1996). Another criticism is that SAP does not take any account of geographical location. Thus, research by Markus (1994) has shown that there can be as much as a 60% difference in the fuel used to create the same warmth in different parts of the country. Markus recommended that a climate severity index should be incorporated in SAP so the difference between this and the energy rating could be compared. SAP also focuses on energy price rather than the type of fuel, yet if the price of electricity falls relative to gas, then an electric heating system could increase a SAP rating while creating greater CO_2 emissions. Finally the SAP has been criticised for setting standards too low. The 1995 SAP targets are only similar to those operating in Denmark and Sweden in the 1960s and it is already possible to get close to the figure of 100 with existing technology. This is an important point because it goes some way to refute claims used in Chapter 8 by the house builders that environmental standards in the UK are already high.

Energy conservation is typically seen as involving buildings with high levels of insulation. This view neglects the form and texture of the exterior of a building. A

rough wall surface may help energy efficiency by slowing wind speeds that would otherwise cool it. Energy loss can also be minimised by the shape of the dwelling. Energy loss can be avoided by compact rather than elongated designs. Building materials with a low thermal conductance can also save energy, as measured by a u-value. This is simply a measure of how many watts pass through one square metre of construction for every temperature degree difference inside and outside a dwelling. Table 3.1 below shows u-values for walls and roofs as the building regulations have tightened. The final figure shows comparable values for one of the best insulated houses in the UK, the autonomous house designed and built by Vale architects.

Table 3.1

	Wall u value (W/m^2K)	Roof u value(W/m^2K)
Building Regulations 1970	1.00	0.60
Building Regulations 1982	0.60	0.35
Building Regulations 1990	0.45	0.25
The Vale house, built 1993	0.14	0.09

Source: Marsh (1996).

Looking at energy conservation in more detail, the two most effective means of reducing energy use and CO_2 emissions are wall insulation and double-glazing. These can result in savings of 41% and 25%, respectively (Shorrock & Henderson, 1990). The importance to be placed on insulation cannot be underestimated, as shown in research by Smith and associates (1995). They compared two social housing developments of identical size, orientation and function, one conforming to current UK building standards and using standard heating technology. The other used condensing boilers and specified high levels of insulation. A lifecycle analysis comparing the higher insulated house with the standard house found a 35% reduction in running costs, a 30% lower maintenance and management cost and a 14% lower major repairs bill for the insulated house. The environmental impact of heating the insulated house was 75% lower. To help increase insulation, timber frame construction can be used in walls, the under-floor area and roof cavities. This is because a timber frame house is supported by vertical posts. Gaps between these posts can be filled with insulating materials. Timber frame is typical in many Scandinavian

countries that have some of the highest environmental standards in new construction. This is an example of a traditional building method being adapted for the modern world. In the UK, with a dominant tradition of building in brick, the environmental case for keeping this building tradition is less clear-cut. Brick clay has to be extracted from the ground and this mineral extraction causes environmental damage. As well as consuming large amounts of energy when fired, the production of bricks is also polluting. Most domestically produced bricks are a product of the Oxford clays, which stretch from Peterborough, through Bedford to Milton Keynes. When burned they emit sulphur dioxide, fluorides, and mercaptans, all of which are potentially harmful to vegetation, animals and humans. At the end of their life, bricks can only be recycled if they have been laid in a soft mortar which can be cleaned off without damaging the brick. In practice most bricks from demolished structures are broken up for hardcore.

Making the most of solar energy and building layout is important at the individual house scale as well as in development layout . A study by the then DoE (1990) showed that houses already receive 29% of their useful space heat from passive solar sources. Current thinking suggests that orienting dwellings to face south and placing the maximum amount of glazing on these walls. Rooms used during the day time should be located along these walls. North facing rooms should have a minimum of windows and be heavily insulated. Placing thermal masses such as masonry walls behind glazing allows these to heat slowly in the daytime, releasing their heat overnight. However, it is important that buildings do not overheat, requiring energy wasting mechanical cooling systems. Yet research in Milton Keynes, where houses were designed with large south facing windows to optimise solar gain, proved unpopular with residents. There were additionally insufficient energy gains when windows were draped with net curtains, which residents used for privacy and due to concerns about security (Lowe et al, 1985). In addition to passive solar gain, active solar features can contribute to reducing energy demand in homes. This comes in two forms, firstly solar panels that contribute to the domestic hot water supply, secondly photovoltaic cells that generate electricity. Like passive solar gain, the key to optimising the solar potential of a site is to orientate buildings broadly to the south. This tends to result in a roughly east-west street pattern. It is possible to move up to

30 degrees away from due south and yet have 90%-95% of maximum output from a photovoltaic cell of solar collector (Llewelyn Davies, 2000).

But as well as the post-construction period, energy consumption is also important during the production of houses. Here, it is estimated that about 70% of energy used in construction is embodied energy in materials, a further 15% is consumed by transport, with 15% in building activity. This means it makes more sense in energy conservation terms to focus on materials than on the construction process. The manufacture of concrete, steel and plastics, as well as their transportation, use significant amounts of energy. This notion of embodied energy is often not taken into account when deciding between building types. The construction of a dwelling itself is essentially an assembly process in which building materials are put together on site. Here there is a clear link to the ecological modernisation literature, as builders can save waste, save money and benefit the environment at the same time. Despite using less energy than that embodied in materials, the energy involved is still significant. Howard (1991) calculates that wastage of materials accounts for 8.5GJ and 0.8t of CO_2 per dwelling. The housebuilding industry is also a major user of sand and gravel. It is estimated that the land take from mining aggregates has been 2,000 hectares per annum since 1987 (Elkin & McLaren, 1991). This has consequences for landscape and habitat disturbance at excavation sites. There are also substantial energy costs involved in transporting aggregates. For aggregates, the largest component of embodied energy is usually transport costs. Moving to energy costs embodied in building materials, about 5%-6% of national energy consumption goes on producing building materials (Rydin, 1995). The energy used to manufacture construction materials used in housing and transport them to site accounts for 2%-3% of the UK's total energy consumption (BRE, 2000a). The energy required to manufacture materials for a three-bedroom semi-detached house with a floor area of $100m^2$ amounted to three years energy consumption once the dwelling was in use.

There is scope for improvement in energy savings in the manufacture of building products. As one example the UK cement industry mainly uses the energy intensive wet process, which uses twice as much energy per tonne as the dry process cement kilns used in Germany (Vale, 1993). A more radical approach to reducing embodied energy can be seen in the renewed interest in vernacular building styles. In the UK

there has been a tradition of building with earth and straw to produce cob buildings. Earth building is done through rammed earth construction or through the manufacture of earthen blocks on site. Depending on the methods of earth manufacture these blocks have an embodied energy about 100 times lower than concrete and 500 times lower than brick (Smith et al, 1998). Over time the rammed earth wall will dry and become as durable as sandstone as long as it is kept dry at top and bottom.

For housebuilding to be more environmentally sound, materials should come from sustainable sources. Here, particular attention has focused on the use of three groups of materials; namely, wood, CfCs and HCFCs, and PVC. This attention is due to the high media profile of tropical deforestation and the depletion of the ozone layer. Britain is one of the largest consumers of tropical hardwoods in the developed world and the largest importer in Europe. In 1988 it was estimated that 50 per cent of tropical hard wood imported into the UK was used in the construction industry. Over two million doors were imported into the UK from tropical countries in 1989 (Elkin et al, 1991). The UK imports 1.56million cubic metres of tropical hardwoods per annum, accounting for 8.7% of all wood used (Rydin, 1992). Currently 95% of wood used in the construction industry needs to be imported (Vale, 1994), with large distances required for transport. The construction industry has also been a major user of CFCs for air conditioning, insulation and fire protection. In 1994 insulation material based on CFC accounted for 9% of the total UK insulation market, although the European Union phased out CFCs from January 1996. The EU has also proposed phasing out HCFCs by 2015. Insulation material has advantages over non-CFC based material being non-flammable, low toxicity and cost effective. But CFC free material can present design problems in inverted flat roofs, ground floors and basements, and external wall linings requiring waterproofing. Cellular glass can be used, as an alternative in these circumstances but is three times as costly. As for PVC, this is used especially in new dwellings for doors and windows. In Britain 24% of all PVC production is for doors and windows (British Plastics Federation, cited in Greenpeace, 1997). Like all plastics, PVC production raises environmental issues. Because it is a petrochemical, it is linked to the oil industry and the environmental problems associated with this industry. Like other plastics it does not biodegrade, so there are problems with its disposal. However, PVC raises environmental concerns beyond those of other plastics. The industrial process used to create the vinyl chloride

monomer that is the building block of PVC is highly polluting, releasing dioxins including TCDD, one of the most toxic chemicals known (Greenpeace, 1997). In its pure form PVC is hard to use, so additives are required which cause considerable environmental concern, including phthalates and heavy metals such as cadmium and lead. PVC is also very difficult to dispose of safely at the end of a building's life. In landfill there are risk that the heavy metals and phthalates may leach out and pollute the ground water (European Commission, 2000). Plastic recycling is also problematic, and it is not possible to recycle for the same, because there is a decline in the quality of the material. A glass bottle can be recycled to give another glass bottle but a PVC window frame many be recycled into a plastic bag, a process called down-cycling to distinguish it from recycling. Moreover, PVC can only undergo recycling a finite number of times. Current European recycling figures for PVC are 0.6% for post consumer waste and only 1%-3% when waste created during the manufacturing process is added to this figure (Association of Plastics Manufacturers in Europe, cited in Greenpeace 1997). The recycling process is itself polluting, releasing hydrogen chloride and benzine.

In general terms, tools initially developed in industrial environmental management have begun to be applied to the housing sector. Perhaps the best know of these are initiatives by the Building Research Establishment. The initial scheme was called BREEAM - Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method. This ranks a development from fair, seven points, to excellent, 24 points. Features such as low capacity flush WCs, using timber from approved sources and using recycled building materials are all considered under the BREEAM system. The scheme was intended to put an end to 'greenwashing' by developers, who made unsubstantiated environmental claims about their development. But despite efforts to establish environmental labelling since 1990, there has been a relatively low take-up among the building sector. This contrasts with office developments, where 25% of offices are accredited. In 2000 the BREEAM for housing was relaunched as 'Ecohomes' (BRE, 2000b) with a revised set of criteria. Ecohomes currently considers seven sets of measures with a strong focus on energy but including transport, pollution, materials, water use, land use, ecology, health and well being. In the Ecohomes scheme a development is rated as either pass, good, very good or excellent, with a scoring from 75 for a pass to 145 for an excellent development. While there is

a strong bias towards the use of lifecycle analysis in determining greenness, qualitative features such as wildlife are also included. At almost exactly the same time, in June 2000 the US Green Building Council launched a surprising similar green building certification scheme. This LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) scheme awards points for environmental quality clumped into five subheadings, water, site, energy, materials and indoor environmental quality. Extra points are awarded for innovation and addressing regionally important environmental issues (Paladino, 2000). Other green labelling schemes have made little impact on building materials. The European Community Eco-labelling system covers 21 products but few that are relevant to new house building have yet been covered or are pending. An eco-label on indoor paints and varnishes was introduced in 1999 and revised in 2002 and an eco-label on hard floor coverings was introduced in 2002. Most of the other items covered are consumer goods and appliances (EU, 2003).

Conclusion

Any attempt to understand and analyse green buildings is instantly confronted by the complexity and scope of environmental issues that could be relevant to buildings. This complexity is added to by the fact that many environmental problems cannot be directly experienced. They are instead revealed through a growing body of scientific data highlighting the environmental impact of houses, ranging from excessive energy consumption contributing to climate change or hardwood flooring contributing to tropical deforestation. Scientific analysis occupies a central position in traditional methods for analysing and assessing the environmental quality of houses. Dominant approaches that measure the greenness of buildings such as the Ecohomes example are based on performance threshold models. These realist approaches create generalised frameworks of assessment that are based on a common and verifiable set of targets on environmental performance. This approach assumes a degree of agreement about what defines sustainable building and that certain types of technology and development are move environmentally sound than others. The concept of green building is fundamentally a social construct and to understand green building more fully there is a need to explain the social structuring of both the identification of environmental problems and the resulting built form. At a national level each contributor to the green building debate will have areas of agreement and

points of contestation (e.g. the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Centre for Alternative Technology, the Building Research Establishment, the Environmental Design Association, Friends of the Earth, etc.). During the course of this research the diverse range of views about important environmental issues associated with new housing emerged in interviews with local and regional actors. It is these different perspectives on green housing that form the basis of subsequent chapters.

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Chapter Four

Housing and environment as Bedfordshire issues

This chapter provides the context for the following chapters, which address three groups of actors - housebuilders, local authorities and environmental groups. The first part of this chapter, provides the historical context to the way in which Bedfordshire's towns and countryside have been shaped by the land-use planning system during the last 50 years. This provides an important background to the origins and political context of current conflicts. For example, strong views have been expressed by local authorities and environmental groups that Bedfordshire has seen too much development, which can be more easily understood when put in the historical framework of the central government's new and expanded towns programme. The current climate for housing development in Bedfordshire is significantly influenced by successive waves of previous development. This concept was described by Doreen Massey (1984), when she used a geological metaphor to describe the current 'landscape'; namely, that successive waves of development settle on an area like geological sediments, each deposit affecting any subsequent deposition. The second part of the chapter examines the current political context of housing development in the county by analysing reports in the local media. Coverage by the local media provides a useful measure of the political importance of housing as a policy issue. If very few articles on housing were written, and few of those mentioned environmental concerns, this would suggest that the environment-housing interchange is an issue of minority interest. Large amounts of coverage would suggest this is an issue that causes significant political interest and/or conflict.

Historical background

The Bedfordshire County Council area is divided into three district councils - South Bedfordshire, Mid Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. The county has a population of about 562,200 with the largest town of Bedford having a population of about 74,770 (Bedfordshire County Council, 2001). Bedfordshire County Council describes its county as a small and densely populated area. The population is predominantly urban, with 73% of the population living in larger towns. Approximately 13% of the land is classified as urban with 75% of the remainderclassed as agricultural. Like other counties in England, the County Council has a statutory responsibility to prepare a structure plan. This sets out the overall framework for development in the county and may identify some larger housing development sites; in Bedfordshire's case an example of such a site is the Elstow Storage Depot. The current Bedfordshire County Council Structure Plan allows for the building of 2,465 dwellings annually. This leads to a figure of 49,300 dwellings between 1991-2011. This represents an increase in the county's population of about 9%, leading to a population at the end of the plan period of 582,500. These figures are based on 1992 calculations by the then DoE, taken as national policy in the 1995 national policy document on housing Our Future Home (DoE, 1995a) that an additional 4.4 million dwellings would be required in England and Wales. However, many disputes about housing numbers in the study period do not take issue with this figure, but are concerned about housing allocations to Bedfordshire in a new regional planning guidance, RPG9 (SERPLAN, 1998). This was the subject of an examination in public during the study period and lead to the Crow Report, which recommended higher levels of housing than the regional planning body, SERPLAN. Despite this, the county only saw completions of around 1,800 dwellings per year for 1995-2000. And while a high level of concern is expressed about the greenbelt, as identified in interviews for this study and in the local media, the level development in the greenbelt has been very low. Thus, between 1991 and 2000 only 428 hectares of greenbelt land was developed. Of this 361 went to a golf course, resulting in only 68 hectares being developed for uses unconnected with agriculture, forestry or golf. This represents less than a quarter of one percent of the total greenbelt area in Bedfordshire.

This concern for the greenbelt is linked to changes in local government boundaries. For, in April 1997, the largest town in Bedfordshire, Luton, was allocated unitary local government status and took on functions previously carried out by Bedfordshire County Council. This creates a rather artificial divide, as the greenbelt of Luton falls within the County Council area. Yet, while there is a sharp boundary between the greenbelt countryside surrounding Luton and nearby villages, such as Cadington and Harlington, these latter villages have not experienced rapid recent growth. One reason for this is that Luton managed to achieve 90% of its urban development in 1996-2000 on previously developed land (Bedfordshire County Council, 1997). The area covered by the Luton Unitary Authority is highly urbanised and is not examined in this research, although its hinterland is. In contrast with Luton, the town of Bedford is surrounded by satellite villages that have experienced recent growth and are the subject to the largest housing proposals in the county (at Elstow and Biddenham). This contrast is clearly illustrated by Figure 4.1, showing open countryside surrounding Luton and satellite villages surrounding Bedford.

Figure 4.1 Scale 1:100,000 (Source Multimap www.multimap.com)

The contrast is further illustrated in development pressure, with nearly 13,000 dwellings built in the northern half of the county (i.e. in Mid Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough council areas) and only 7,100 in the southern part over the 1991 and 2000 period (Bedfordshire County Council, 1997). Moreover, unlike Luton's figure of 90% usage of previously developed land, the rest of the county only achieved a figure of 41% for 1996-2000.

To understand different patterns of housing development, it is necessary to appreciate the land-use planning context in which development takes place. In this regard, all three district councils (Bedford Borough Council, Mid Bedfordshire District Council and South Bedfordshire District Council) renewed their local plans during the study period. These are the detailed documents that deal with the allocation of housing sites. In practical terms what this means, is that, during the study period, planners were often using three different documents to assess development applications. These were: an adopted plan from the early 1990s, which covered the start of the study period; a consultation draft, which officers acknowledged they used for development control purposes despite the document not having been assessed at public inquiry; and the new adopted version after the public inquiry. The policy content of these local plans is drawn upon in subsequent chapters to provide confirmation or otherwise of trends identified in interview material.

Looking at the district councils themselves, here we find a somewhat differing settlement structure, which has implications for countryside areas. Mid Bedfordshire is composed of several medium sized market towns, for example, Sandy (population 11,400) and Biggleswade (population 12,734). This council is also responsible for a number of large villages and smaller towns, including Shefford (3,234), Potton (4,162), Ampthill (6,099) and Flitwick (10,833). South Bedfordshire is different as it is primarily a rural area with three medium-sized towns, Leighton Buzzard (31,889), Houghton Regis (15,762) and Dunstable (33,202). Economically, South Bedfordshire is dominated by the nearby towns of Luton and Milton Keynes, and to a lesser extent by commuting from Leighton Buzzard to London by rail. Quite different from these two districts, Bedford Borough is dominate by the single large town of Bedford and its satellite villages of Kempston and Biddenham.

Outside the main towns, just under one quarter of the county lies within a green belt. The designation of a greenbelt in the south of Bedfordshire was at the time controversial. This is described by an interviewee who has been an active member of CPRE and a village preservation society for over 20 years:

> James Aldridge, he's quite an elderly man. He's over 80. He was an engineer with a business in Luton and was chairman of the County Council some long time ago, and it was he who was the driving force behind setting up the South Bedfordshire Green Belt, which was of course an amazing achievement, because you know he got a greenbelt in this area and greenbelts are set in stone now, we won't get any more, and he has been absolutely vital for preserving the south of the county, at a time when the countryside here wasn't really thought to be all that special, but it's seen that the limestone villages in north Bedfordshire, very attractive, but the rest of Bedfordshire, cabbage fields.

The greenbelt is not evenly distributed between the districts, for seven-eighths of South Bedfordshire is greenbelt but only one-sixth of Mid Bedfordshire is so designated. Similarly, nearly 90% of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Bedfordshire County is located in South Bedfordshire, with the remainder in Luton and Mid Bedfordshire.

As far as land use is concerned, agriculture the most significant land-use in Bedfordshire. At the time of the 1991 census there were still a significant proportion of people in north Bedfordshire employed in agriculture, accounting for 9.9% of the workforce compared to 6.9% in South Bedfordshire. These figures tend to underplay the importance of agriculture to the rural economy as they do not include off-farm processing or businesses closely linked to farming, such as haulage or farm machinery supply. The following quote from a local architect argues this point:

> Well, there is a lot of north Bedfordshire villages that the council would not allow too much development in because they still, like the village I live in, they are still very rural and at least fifty per cent earn their money on the land in one way or other... All right there are whiz kids that live there but we have sheep and things.

The greater incidence of traditional rural landscapes in north Bedfordshire are highlighted by Houfe (1995) and Henderson and Hoggart (2002). It will become clear in Chapter Eight that this diversity across the county is significant in helping account for development pressure differences across the county. In terms of farm production,

in north Bedfordshire farmers tend to concentrate on cereal crops, while those in Mid and South Bedfordshire are more involved in vegetables and a wider mix of crops. However, the concentration on cereals has been strengthened in the last 20 years with a decline in the labour intensive vegetable sector (Henderson & Hoggart, 2002). Alongside these changes, agriculture has seen significant declines in financial returns, with a report on Bedfordshire's agriculture by Deloitte and Touche (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 2 November 1997) reporting that average profits dropped by a quarter between 1996 and 1997. Returns per hectare also fell from £363 to £278, with a decline in income occurring despite increased yields. A number of institutional investors, such as pension funds holding investments in Bedfordshire farmland have in many cases relinquished their holdings due to falling returns (Henderson & Hoggart, 2002). This is significant because pension funds can be significant promoters of new settlements at structure plan inquiries and regional planning guidance examinations in public.

Intensified agriculture, mineral extraction and urban expansion have left the county with a depleted natural environment. Illustrative of this, Bedfordshire has the lowest proportion of important wildlife habitats of any county in the South East. Only 1.2% of the county's land area is designated as being in a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), with 7.1% recognised as semi-natural habitat. This compares with the South East averages of 6.7% and 18.5%, respectively. However, it should be noted that the South East averages include many coastal areas, where large sections of agriculturally unproductive land, such as mud flats, have been designated. In agriculture, the habitats that have suffered most as a result of agricultural pressure have been small woodlands, which have been 'grubbed up', and the draining and 'improvement' of many of the water meadows close to the Ouse (Meadows, 1996). The depletion of the natural environment has also been caused by sand and gravel extraction for aggregates, particularly near Leighton Buzzard, for Fullers Earth extraction near Aspley Guise, and as a result of a long history of clay extraction to meet the demands of the London Brick Company in Marston Vale. These brickfield areas have become popular sites with developers for landfill, with the 1994 Regional Planning Guidance for the South East identifying Marston Vale as a landfill resource of regional importance. Yet, concern over the quality of the local environment has led to a large area around Marston Vale being designated a community forest. The community

forest aims to carry out restoration ecology, in order to improve the environment for local residents, for inhabitants of nearby Bedford, and even for tourism (Countryside Agency, 1999).

Set within the context, development pressure in Bedfordshire for much of the last 50 years has been greatest in the southern part of the county. The population of South Bedfordshire expanded dramatically from 46,000 in 1951 to 111,000 in 1996. In 1951 Houghton Regis, a small village north of Dunstable, was designated as part of the New and Expanded Towns Programme. The pressure for growth in South Bedfordshire is shown in the 1967 Bedfordshire County Structure Plan, which allocated large areas of proposed greenbelt land to the east and west of Leighton Buzzard for residential development. This resulted in a doubling of this town's population between 1961 and 1981 from 15,900 to 31,500, although housing construction has since slowed, so Leighton Buzzard had 33,300 inhabitants in 1996. Even so, with 7,836 dwellings constructed in South Bedfordshire between 1981 and 1998, the 1992 Bedfordshire County Structure Plan was still proposing housing levels that were significantly higher than predicted local need (Bedfordshire County Council, 1992). However, so far, much of the expected in-migration has failed to materialise, as economic recession affected the housing market in the early 1990s.

It would be accurate to say that, during the last 50 years, housing development pressure in South Bedfordshire has largely been due to external forces (central government designations in the New and Expanded Towns Programme and Bedfordshire County Council's decisions to remove areas from the proposed green belt). External forces have also been critical in the north of the county. Thus. the 1994 Regional Planning Guidance Note for the South East stared that the long-term strategy was to move the weight of new development to the north of the county so as to lessen pressure on Luton's greenbelt. When the Bedfordshire Structure Plan was adopted in 1997 it advocated a twofold approach. Firstly, it advocated concentrating development in the urban centres. These were defined as Luton, Bedford, Dunstable, Leighton/Linslade, Houghton Regis, Biggleswade, Sandy, Flitwick and Ampthill. Linked to this approach is the need to utilise underused or derelict land within urban areas to improve the quality of the urban environment. The second concentration is to be two transport corridors, one a north-south corridor near Sandy and Biggleswade,

the other extending from Bedford in a south-westerly direction. Despite the northerly emphasis in these corridors, the north of the county has in fact experienced considerable difficulty meeting its responsibilities for new housing targets. One reason for this is that larger sites have been slow to progress through the planning system, either due to disagreement between government and developers about funding the Bedford bypass, which will service new developments, and increasing concern nationally about developments in areas subject to flooding.

Positioning the local media

During the late 1980s and early 1990s the local media nationally experienced a period of rapid change and growth. At a time of retrenchment and declining public trust in the national media, the persistent diversity of the local media has been remarkable (Deacon, 1993). The question of where to position the local press in this research is not a straightforward one. The local press can be viewed simply as a source of information about housing development in Bedfordshire - where did developments occur, who were the developers, who objected to them and were they built? This was certainly one usage of the local media in this research, for it did provide factual information by giving names of relevant councillors, officers, environmental groups and occasionally builders, who were involved with specific developments. This was one source of information on potential interviewees. Likewise, those who regularly contributed letters or were quoted in articles were considered as potential informants. But as private companies that rely on sales or advertising for their revenue, media enterprises must have an eye for the interests of the buying public, such that they need to report issues that attract local 'heat'. Some of these issues, such as those surrounding greenbelt protection in Bedfordshire, reflect priorities within the national media or national policy circles, whereas other issues reflect local priorities, as seen over the loss of allotments. Dissimilarities also emerge between newspapers and in reporting by different journalists, each of which is explored in this chapter. However, I will argue that the features the newspapers have in common are far more fundamental than their differences.

In this regard, material in the local press is not an unbiased collection of facts and figures. No piece of media reporting can be viewed as purely factual and free from

influence, either in the way news stories are presented or in the stories given coverage. A wide range of factors can influence local media reporting of events, for example the individual journalist, the editor, the newspaper owner and the views of advertisers and sponsors. For Vangsnes (1993), local newspaper dependence on a few advertisers has a strong influence on editorial policy. In a newspaper published in a small town there are few advertisers and Vangsnes holds that the newspaper cannot afford to offend any of them. This is supported by Thompson (1989), who found regional and local newspapers were far more dependent on advertising revenue than the national press. Equally, both for free and bought newspapers, there is a need to sustain (or expand) a readership. Hence, a reflexive process operates. On the one hand, the community shapes and directly contributes to what is reported in the news. On the other hand, community views are influenced by what is in the media. Among academics the debate is divided between those that see the media as playing a causal role in changing perceptions, attitudes, opinions and behaviour (e.g. Jordan 1993; Siune et al, 1994; Stice and Shaw, 1994; Bankole, 1996) and those who believe the media provides only a superficial pointer to the public on issues of concern (e.g. Hansen, 1991; Burgess, 1993). Yet, despite disagreements about the role of the media in influencing public opinion, commentators like Burgess (1993) and Jordan (1993) find common ground over the importance of academic study of the media. Hence, in assessing media representations of environmental issues, Burgess (1993, p51) argues that:

> We live in a media saturated society and yet, perhaps just because the media are so ubiquitous, there has been a marked tendency for environmentalists and academics to take the role of the media in green politics for granted. This oversight urgently needs to be rectified because the media have become the dominant communicative form through which social meaning of nature are represented.

Put in a different context, research has suggested that political news is the product of a process of negotiation between, and mutual construction by, journalists and the politically active, which commonly means politicians but can extend to pressure groups and the like (Franklin 1991). Then is the local press like a lobby group? Could it be placed with environmental NGOs, as a source of pressure on local authorities and the builders? The general view on this was captured by a senior journalist, when asked if the newspaper ran campaigns:

We would try and put people's point of view over over, if we had been telephoned by somebody... It depends on what it is. We have a campaign running at the moment, which is, it's not actually a campaign, of the newspaper. It's being partly organised by our chairman, who is our sole proprietor, which is for a directly elected mayor. That's a political issue which we would get involved in. But we are always very careful to put both sides. We don't, I mean I am sure there are instances and have been in the past, on which the paper has become involved and said, this is what we think. But certainly I don't recall it happening since I've been here.

An active campaigning role for the press did not fit the pattern that emerged in Bedfordshire from interviews with journalist and others. More appropriately, the coverage of events in Bedfordshire is seen to be affected by the ability of groups of actors - environmental groups, builders and local authorities - to put their viewpoints across effectively, so their messages are included in the media. Not to be discounted here is research by Jordan (1993), which found a puzzling inability by many key groups to change public opinion significantly, including NGOs and opposition politicians. He concluded that the differing and contradictory views given by different factions of political opposition and different NGOs had the effect of cancelling each other out. In order to explore such possibilities, the role of environmental NGOs, builders and local authorities are examined in detail in this chapter.

Theoretically the media is often seen as a supportive part of the growth machine. Thus, for the USA, Logan and Molotch (1987) conclude that the local media is part of a network of local business people with a vested interest in promoting city expansion. Members of growth coalitions promote the intensification of land use, because this is in their interest. In order to maximise the political and pubic acceptability of these policies, they are presented as being in the common good. The local media, it is suggested, plays an important role in linking the narrow interests of the growth coalition to those of the population as a whole. In doing this notions of civic pride are evoked, political issues are passed-off as technical ones and symbolic issues are focused on at the expense of discussions of substance. This interpretation of the local media is greatly at odds with the pattern that emerged in Bedfordshire when coverage of new housing developments was examined. A more interpretation would see a strong link between the local media and the community. In attempting to understand this relationship, Loomis and Meyer (2000) argue that the future of newspapers is tied to the strength of the community. They argue that newspaper readership is unlikely to

turn upwards if the sense of community moves downwards. Newspapers therefore have a stake in the sense of community. Loomis and Meyer hold that, in communities where a strong bond exists between the media and the community, there is more trust in the media and more knowledge about government. This message emerged from interviews for this study, with journalists feeling that an important part of their role was to show how government decisions at all levels affected people in Bedfordshire:

> The average bloke on the street is not going to pick up a local plan and understand what the government is coming up with until people like us, of Newsroom Southeast or the competition across the road say, oy, by the way did you know we need 200,000 new houses, and that means we are going to have to concrete from here to Luton. Put it in those terms and people do become very interested.

Offering some insight on this, Hindman (1998) argues that, in modern neighbourhoods, people seldom know their immediate neighbours, and certainly do not know most individuals in their area. Although neighbourhood newspapers cannot replace face-to-face interaction , they can provide a forum through which readers learn about issues of concern in their neighbourhood and by which they can voice a point of view. Through the local media, local issues can be raised, conflicts acknowledged and voices heard. This complex relationship between the community, the three groups of actors studied here and the issues involved in housebuilding, will be addressed in the rest of this chapter.

Newspapers operating in Bedfordshire

As a starting place for an analysis of local media reports, newspapers that were in print in Bedfordshire during 1995- 2000 were systematically examined for articles about new housing development. The initial criterion for selecting newspaper articles for analysis was that an article was either about a specific development of houses or offered a more general commentary on new houses in the county. The six papers that were used in the research were: the *Bedford Times and Citizen*, the *Bedfordshire Herald*, the *Leighton Buzzard Observer*, *Bedfordshire on Sunday*, the *Biggleswade Chronicle*, and the *Dunstable Gazette*. All these newspapers were studied from January 1995 until December 2000, apart from the *Herald*, which ceased publication in 1998. The newspapers were all aimed at a geographical community rather than a community of faith or a community-based on ethnic origins. There were no regional newspapers, such as the *Cambridge Evening News* or the *Eastern Daily Press*, which

regularly had news stories on Bedfordshire. One of the Hertfordshire papers, the Hitchin-based *Comet*, occasionally covered stories about Stotfold and its surrounding countryside. These stories also appeared in the Bedfordshire newspapers, and only made up about 5% of the news items reported in the *Comet*, so the *Comet* was not included in the survey. From the reverse angle, the *Leighton Buzzard Observer* carried a considerable amount of material about villages in Buckinghamshire, for residents of villages in Aylesbury Vale come into Leighton Buzzard for shopping, leisure and education. As these villages were not part of the study area these items were not included in the study. Similarly the *Biggleswade Chronicle* occasionally covered stories about north Cambridgeshire villages. Table 4.1 gives a profile of the current status of the local press in Bedfordshire. There is a clear dividing line between free papers, which depend entirely for their income on advertising, and reach about one-third of the population, and bought papers, which are purchased by less than 7% of the population. However, it should be noted that there is no guarantee that free papers are read by the people who receive a copy, so the implied imbalance here might be less than the above figures imply. Moreover, all the newspapers tried to offer a general coverage – to be for everyone in their area – rather than overtly supporting one political party or directing their commentaries at one subsection of society.

Table 4.1

Newspaper Name	Type	Frequency	Circulation volume	Penetration *
Bedford Times and Citizen	Free	weekly	75,842	32.3%
Bedfordshire on Sunday	Free	Sunday	107,558	45.6%
Biggleswade Chronicle	Bought	weekly	10,715	4.6%
Leighton Buzzard Observer	Bought	weekly	7,037	3.0%
Dunstable Gazette	Bought	weekly	15,877	6.8%

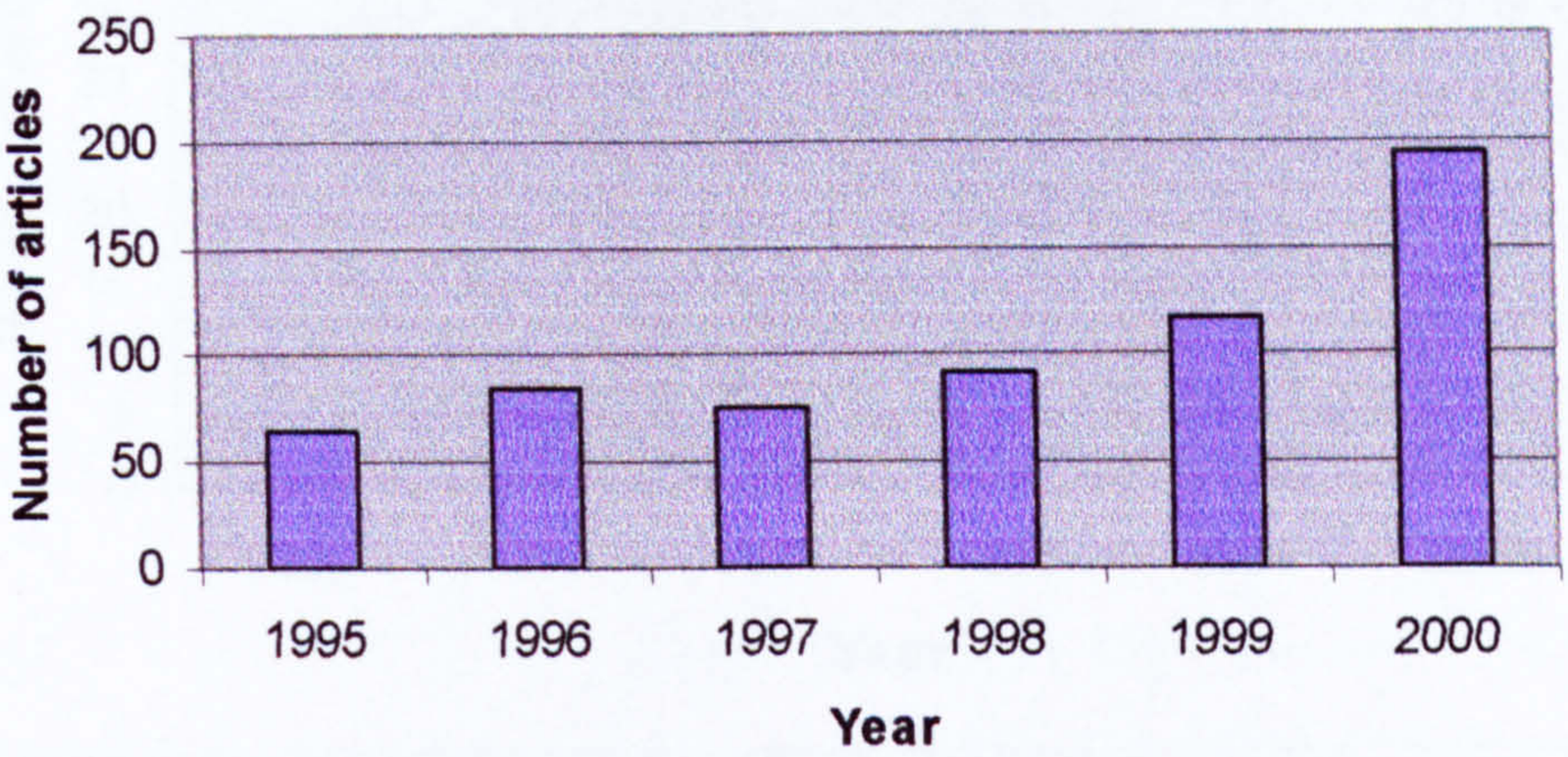
Source (May 2002 http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk)

*penetration refers to % of households receiving a copy.

The quantity of newspaper coverage

The review of newspaper articles conducted here generated a total of 667 articles that fitted the selection criteria. Of these articles 489 or 73% mentioned one or more environmental issues. A clear increase in the priority given to the housing by the local press can be seen when looking at newspaper coverage as a whole. Figure 4.2 shows this increase across all newspapers, with the total number of articles increasing from 65 in 1995 to 194 in 2000.

Figure 4.2 Number of articles in all newspapers during study period 1995-2000



This trend was stronger in some newspapers than others, with the *Bedford Times and Citizen* showing an increase in coverage that was much greater than the overall trend, as shown in Figure 4.3 and Figure 4.4, whereas other newspapers, particularly the *Dunstable Gazette*, did not display a strong upward trend.

This significant change in the volume of reporting should not be viewed as surprising. As Oliver and colleagues (2000) argue, there is every reason to expect the pattern of media coverage to change across time and to be sensitive to ongoing political processes. Yet there was surprisingly little overlap in coverage, with the only occasions when a story appeared in three or more newspapers occurring when a major central government announcement was made about housing figures and quotes were taken from County Council press releases about this issue. In terms of reporting on individual sites there was some overlap between the *Times and Citizen* and *Bedfordshire on Sunday*, with a very small overlap between the *Biggleswade Chronicle* and *Bedfordshire on Sunday*. However, when individual sites were covered

by two newspapers, this was often not in the same week and covered different aspects of a development.

Figure 4.3 Times and Citizen - increasing coverage over time

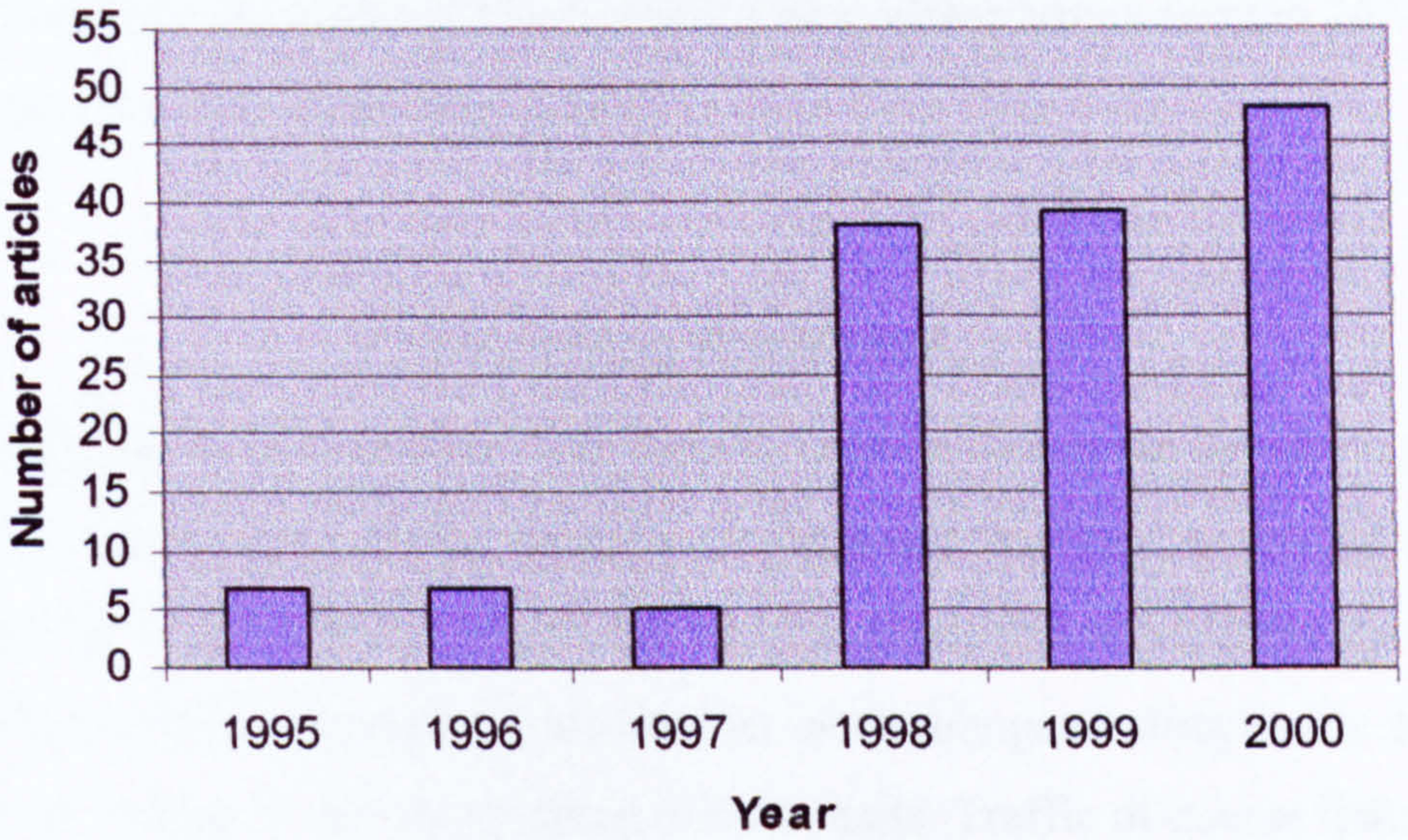
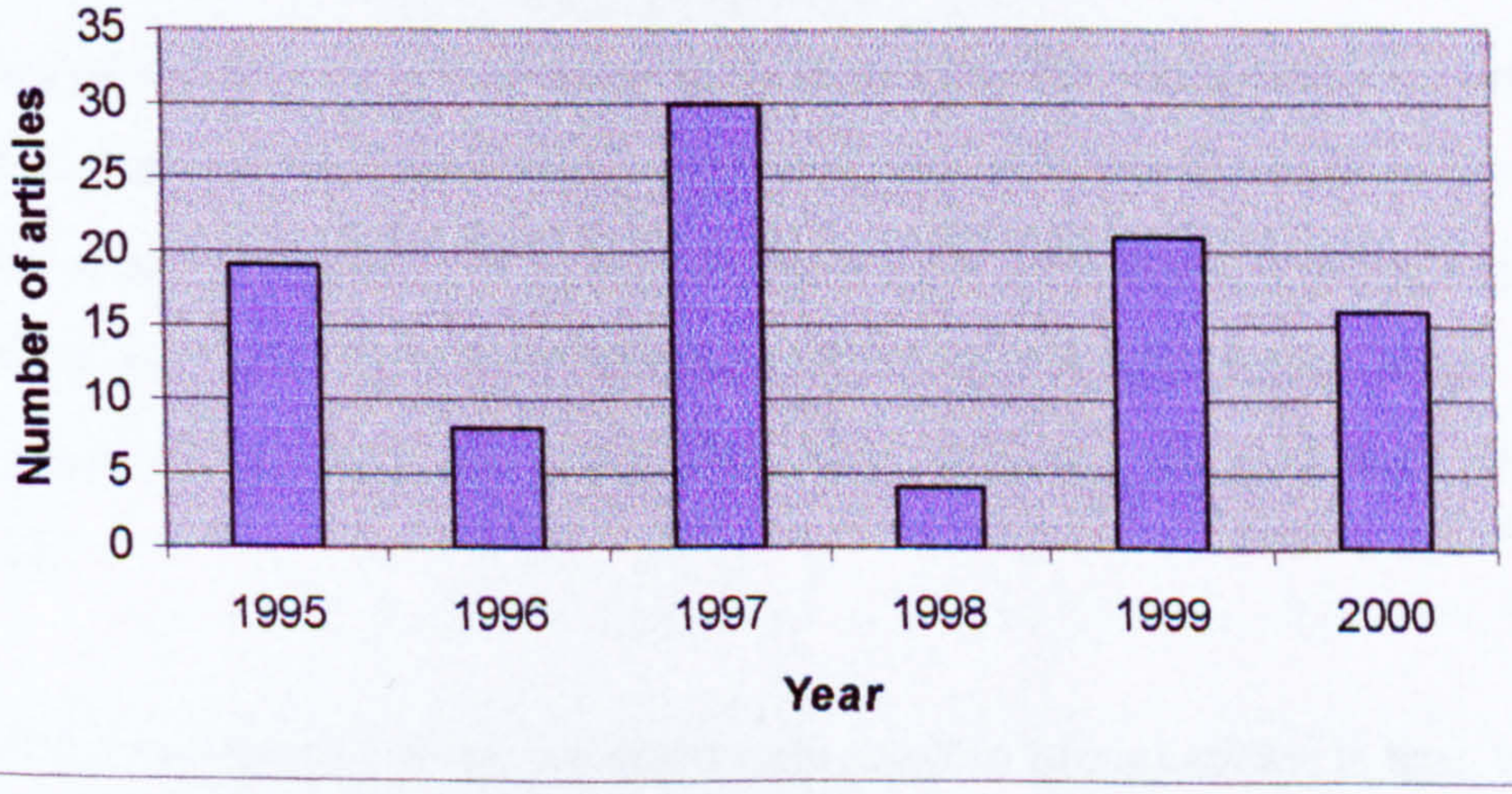


Figure 4.4 Dunstable Gazette - increasing coverage over time



Set items of information were obtained from each newspaper article. The date was one obvious item, as change over time was to be assessed. The date was also used to

see if coverage in the local press tied in with other local or national events, such as an increase in national media coverage or parliamentary elections. In this regard it is worth noting that there was no increase in coverage of housing or environmental issues in the run up to the General Election and local elections of May 1997. There was also no evidence from media reports of efforts by any political party or environmental group to turn housing into an election issue. Another category of information that was recorded was whether the item was an article or a letter. Apart from one newspaper, the *Bedford Times and Citizen*, where letters formed 24 % of the items covered, very few letters were found.

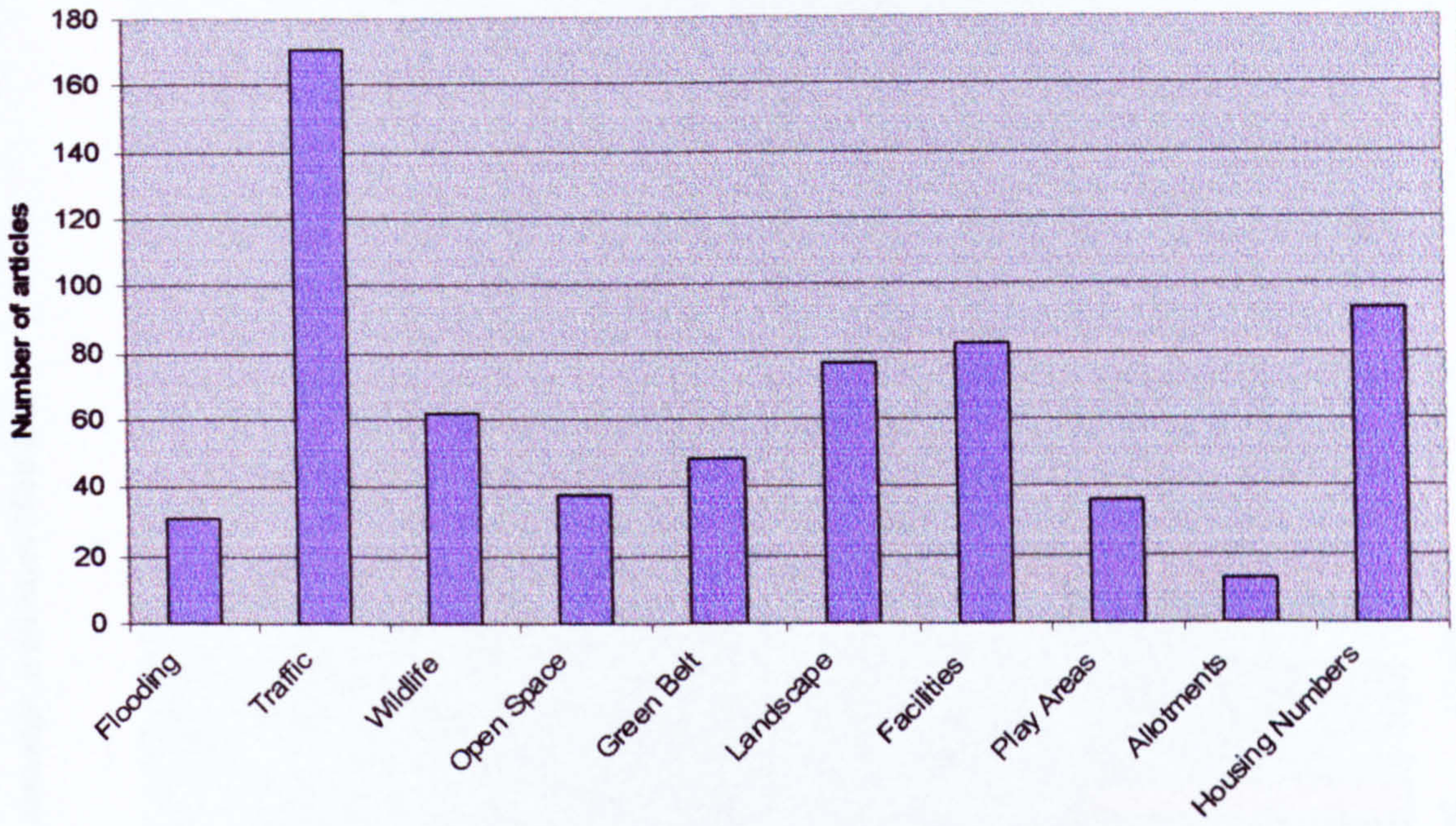
Introducing the Issues

The most important issues related to housing that were raised in the newspapers as items of policy debate were traffic, housing numbers and facilities. In the following sections the way in which these different issue were presented will be discussed in detail. New housing developments were seen as inevitably generating traffic and in some instances to lead to the construction of new roads. Traffic of course links into other issues. Thus, new roads and bridges or greatly increased traffic on previously little used rural roads were seen as presenting a danger to wildlife and their habitats. Increasing the amount of non-porous surfaces through road building also raises concerns about flooding. Concerns over facilities, such as doctors surgeries or primary schools, revolved around fears that they would be overstretched, with further development resulting in more people trying to use an under-resourced service. Perhaps housing numbers is not an issue in its own right but shorthand for a range of environmental impacts that occur when large numbers of house are built in the countryside. Of all the articles, 26% were about traffic, 14% about housing numbers and 12% facilities (Figure 4.5). After these three issues, six other issues were prominent: playingfields and play areas, allotments, flooding, the greenbelt, wildlife and landscape.

What should be recognised about concerns expressed in press articles is that, unlike responses to land-use planning applications or to local plans, individuals and organisations are not constrained by the need to comment only on issues that count as material considerations, as they are under the town and country planning system.

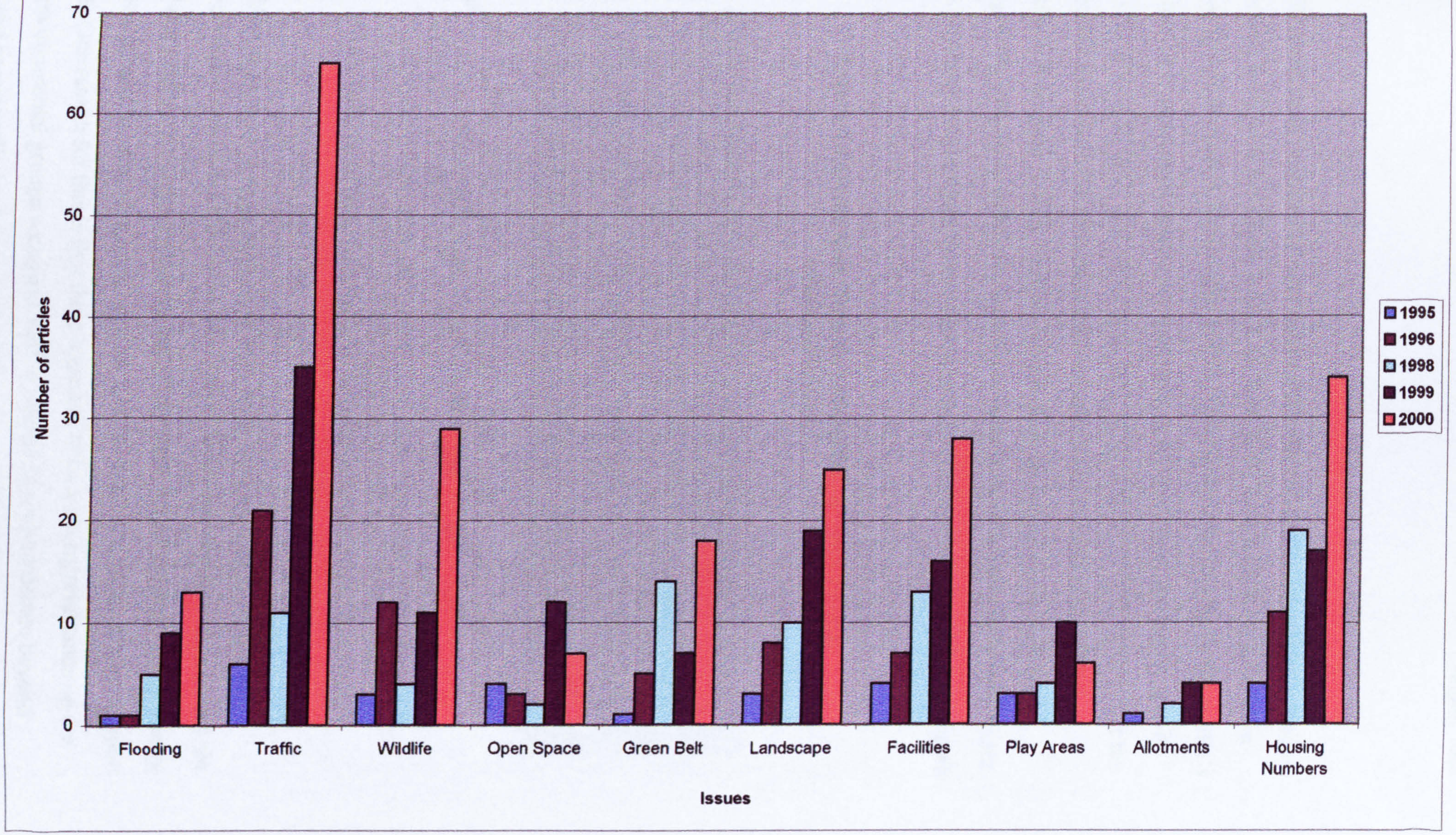
Therefore, an analysis of media coverage reveals different issues raised than those the same individuals can bring out in a different context. Interestingly in this context, there are no obvious signs of cross-correlation between related issues in media reports.

Figure 4.5 Coverage of all environmental issues in all newspapers



For example, articles that mention landscape were not likely to mention the greenbelt. There was also no correlation between articles that report on wildlife and those that mention either landscape or the greenbelt. Yet there were changes over time in the reporting of issues. Concerns about traffic, flooding and housing numbers increased at a greater rate than the overall level of reporting. Concerns about other issues like play areas and allotments remained more constant throughout the period (Figure 4.6). In terms of coverage, it is worth noting Rydin and Pennington's (2001) analysis of local press coverage of environmental issues in Brighton and Torbay. They found that, while council documents and public opinion surveys found the beach environment and air pollution to be high priorities, most environmental groups focused on protection of green spaces. Linked to this, green spaces were issues in far more press articles, with longer and more detailed coverage than other environmental issues, indicating a quantitative and qualitative correlation between activism and media coverage. This has close links with the situation in Bedfordshire, where local groups who campaigned on wildlife and open space issues were in the majority, elevating this issue to greater importance than it would otherwise have achieved.

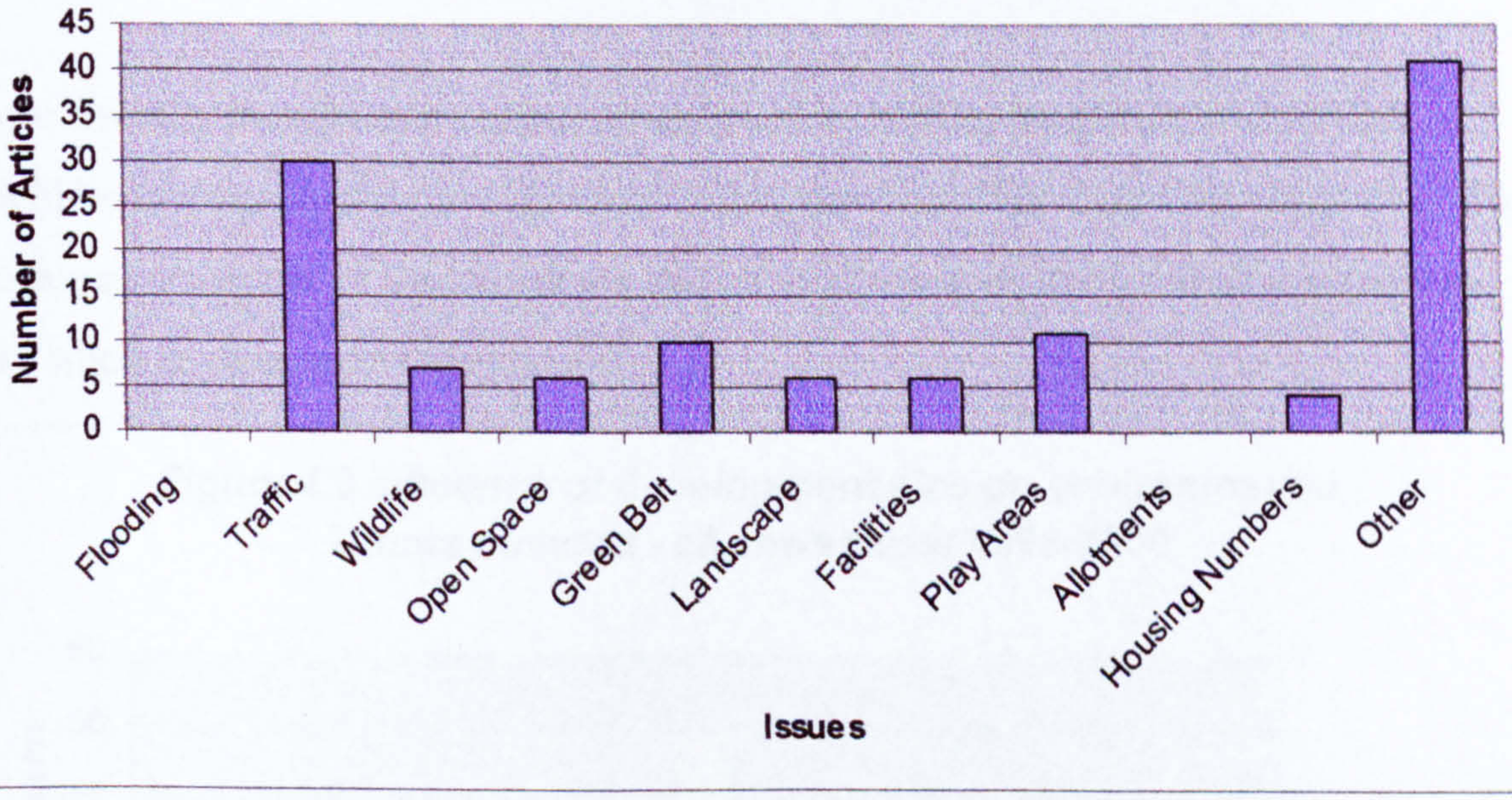
Figure 4.6 Change in coverage of all isues 1995-2000



Traffic

The traffic generating potential of new housing developments, along with new road to accommodate them, was the single largest concern in the Bedfordshire media when new housing was discussed. Nationally, traffic consistently rates highly in the public's perception of environmental issues. For example, in 1998, 52% of the public said it was the environmental issue that concerned them most (DETR, 1998). Nearly half the British public agree with the statement that 'the motor car is ruining the British countryside' (Worcester, 2000). Traffic was the dominant issue in each of the six newspapers. This focus on traffic is especially strong in the *Dunstable Gazette*, where traffic is mentioned three times more often than any other environmental issue (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.7 Dunstable Gazette 1995-2000 - articles about different issues.

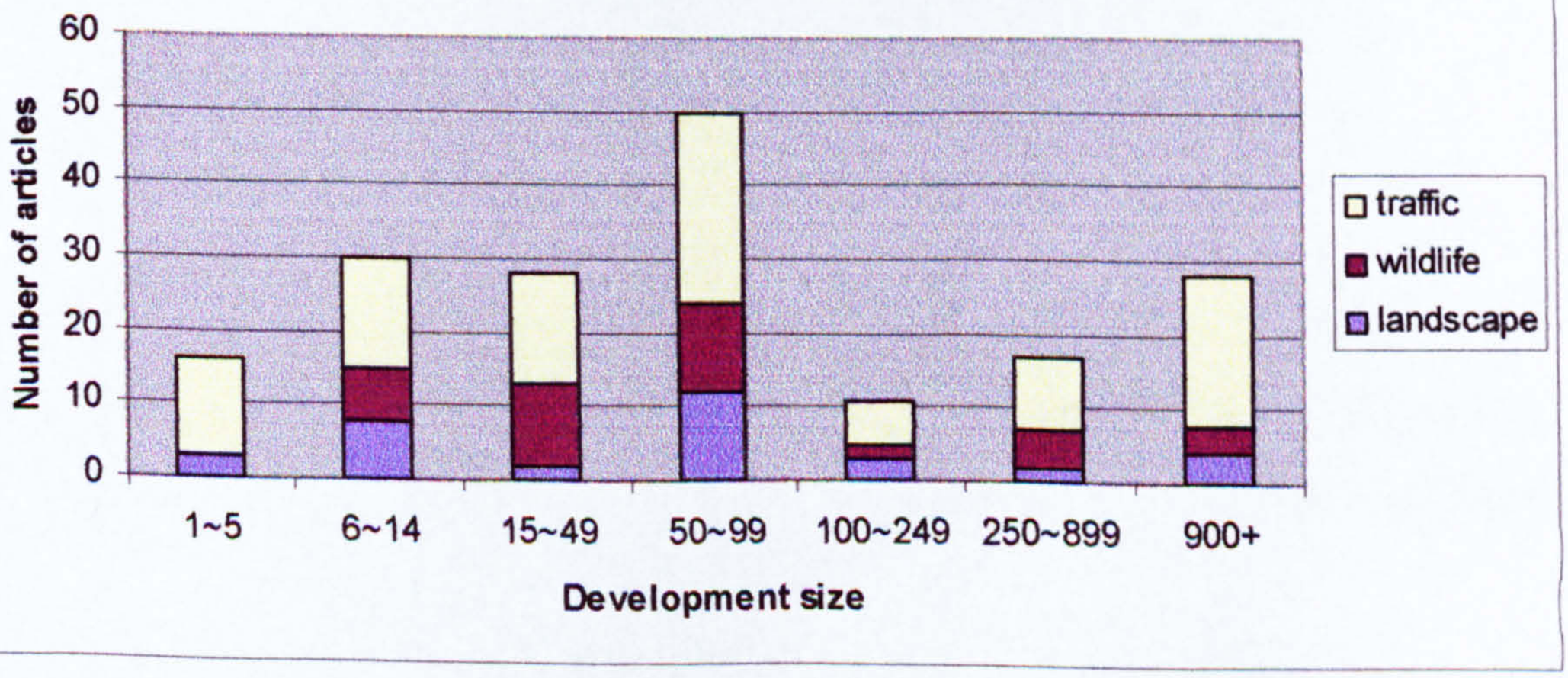


Yet, despite its prominence, the quality of debate on traffic issues was relatively unsophisticated compared to that on (say) wildlife. Moreover, media concerns did not reflect those held by the County Council about transport, which relate to wider energy concerns, such as climate change, and emphasised the need to develop along transport corridors. One reason for this is that there appeared to be a strong reluctance on the part of environmental groups with paid staff to engage in a wider debate beyond wildlife and occasionally landscape and public access issues. Thus, in the interviews

that will be reported in Chapter six, what emerged was a strong focus amongst environmental groups on wildlife issues. Possibly this is allied to the fact that wildlife and nature conservation are popular hobbies. Consequently, it is reasonably easy for residents groups to find someone who knows something about local birds to speak to the newspaper. By contrast, it is more difficult for groups to engage in debate over the consequences of traffic volume increases from new housing developments. That said, if environmental groups see traffic as an important environmental issue, they are in a position to make representations to the media, as these groups are not being ignored in press coverage. Indeed, concerns over traffic were reported for a wide population spectrum - environmental groups, ordinary residents, councillors and council officers. There appeared to be no difference in the sophistication of points raised by these population groups, although longer established environmental groups, such as CPRE and Friends of the Earth, emerges in interview (Chapter six) as avoiding involvement with very small schemes, so they were not found expressing concern over traffic issues involving developments of five to ten houses.

It was initially thought that certain issues, such as traffic, landscape and wildlife, would be more prominent in objections to large and medium-sized developments. So it came as a surprise to find residents and councillors objecting on traffic ground to very small developments (Figure 4.8).

Figure 4.8 Influence of development size on environmental issues covered - all newspaper 1995-2000



However, there were only two distinct strands in the traffic debate. Firstly, small developments generated a surprising level of concern over traffic levels. For example,

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> Rebecca Grant-Jones, 12, says she has proved the proposed western bypass will be grid-locked as soon as it opens. And the Bedford high school pupil has sent her findings to Tony Blair. The building of the bypass, linking the A428 and A421 is to be accompanied by up to 2,500 houses on land south of Biddenham. Rebecca thinks the new homes will mean extra cars and traffic chaos. She wrote 'I have worked out that if the length of the new road four kilometres, and the average number of cars per household is 1.2, if you put all these cars on the bypass bumper to bumper they would fill it three times over... People say it would remove traffic jams but it would only make things worse. I think it is just a few people trying to make a lot of money'. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 26 November 1999)

Overall, then, the links between traffic problems and new housing are portrayed in the media as an important political issue, about which dispute arises over environmental impacts.

Public facilities and play areas

A widespread concern in settlements of all sizes was extra strain on public facilities that the occupants of new dwellings would cause. This concern was strongest in the settlements of Sandy, Stotfold and Wootton, each of which faced proposals for large developments with limited existing facilities. Concern also occurred in larger settlements, like Leighton Buzzard, and in smaller villages, but was particularly strong in these larger villages and smaller towns. In smaller settlements the absence of key service, such as a shop, post office, primary school or doctors surgery, was seen as a reason for refusing planning permission. For example:

> Plans to build 130 houses in a village are being opposed by the parish council. Frank Denton Chairman of the parish council said '... Marston Moretaine has very few facilities. The developments are going at a great speed and there are not the facilities to back it up. We haven't got a doctors surgery, chemist nor a library'. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 14 May 1998)

Concerns over facilities were most commonly raised by councillors and local residents, but much less frequently by environmental groups and council officers. In interview, one journalist explained how even small developments caused controversy over access to facilities:

> I suppose for people living in the town centre the idea of someone building another 10,000 houses is not going to be that worrying as an initial point, until you think, hang on a minute, where am I going to go for a picnic on Sunday? What are they going to do? Are they going to build on the Dunstable Downs? How's that going to work? So, if on the other

> hand you say, well, they are actually intending building houses at the end of your road, it's going to mean your children fall outside the catchment area for [the nearest] school, and this is how it's going to affect you, obviously it's something much more local and something we would cover much more.

Although it might be expected that larger developments would bring facilities with them, in fact not all large developments were allocated their own facilities. Thus, the Beazer Homes proposal for RAF Stanbridge, near Leighton Buzzard, had 575 houses but no community facilities:

> The council's worries about the lack of amenities on the development plans have been echoed by Daphne Oram of the Leighton Buzzard Preservation Society. She said the plans showed intensive housing with only small play area for over 500 homes with no room for shops, social centre, pub or amenities. She said we really don't think the public really appreciate what is planned for the site. The sheer size of the development. More than 500 homes without any infrastructure. We are very worried, what about school provision... (*Leighton Buzzard Observer* 30 October 1997)

Larger developments did more often come with promises to provide facilities. In several cases, facilities like shops and recreational amenities appear in publicity material, to encourage buyers on to the estate, in masterplanning documents and even in outline planning permission. But these facilities were sometimes dropped at a later stage. The largest example of this is the Fallowfields Estate in Sandy:

> Nearly a thousand householders are still awaiting facilities on their estate which they were promised more than five years ago. More than 100 residents descended on Sandy Upper School to blast councillors and planners about their housing estate, Fallowfields in the town. They claim they were promised shops, a restaurant, a pub and a five acre children's play area and nothing has been provided. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 23 April 2000)

This example is discussed in Chapter eight, where we see how builders also sometimes fail to implement promised environmental improvements. For present purposes, the conclusion is that the absence of key services or extra strain on existing services was an issue of particular concern.

Wildlife

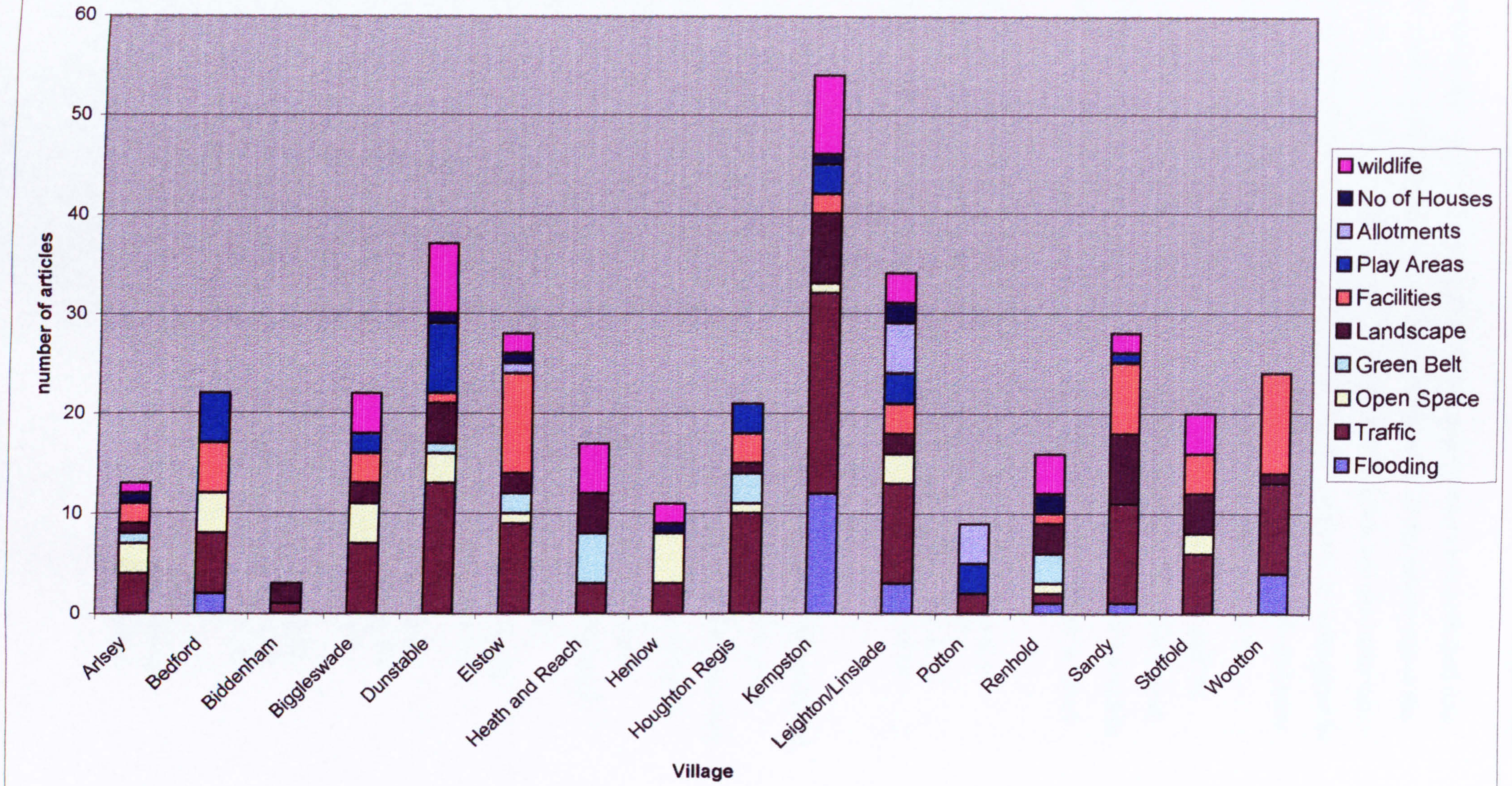
The number of stories about wildlife rose consistently during the study period, despite a national decline in news stories about wildlife and biodiversity (Smith, 2000). A large proportion of the stories expressed a general concern about damage to wildlife as a result of a particular housing development going ahead. Concern for wildlife occurred in settlements of all sizes but seemed particularly strong in settlements at the rural-urban fringe of Renhold, Heath and Reach, and Kempston (Figure 4.9). Articles and letters refer to the loss of 'a haven for wildlife', of the need to 'protect wildlife' and to avoid 'destroying wildlife habitats'. Based on press coverage, development is seen to be in direct conflict with wildlife. Even where a compromise was sought, such as leaving part of a site as a nature reserve, there was still a view that the site should be left in a 'natural' state. When individual habitats were mentioned in the press this was commonly for those with aesthetically pleasing qualities and opportunities for informal recreation, such as woodland and water meadows. Yet concerns about wildlife were raised by all groups - ordinary residents, environmental groups and councillors, with the comments by councillors usually expressing a very general concern about threats to wildlife. It is over wildlife that the clearest evidence was found of environmental and civic groups driving the news agenda.

In this regard, clear differences emerged in the way residents and residents groups conceptualised the wildlife value, compared with the views of experts like planning inspectors, council officers and those with paid posts in conservation campaigning groups, such as the Wildlife Trust,. Wildlife professionals more articulately presented the value of a site as of national importance, with this point often related to uniqueness within Bedfordshire. The following example is illustrative:

> A nature reserve is under threat from plans for new housing, green campaigners have claimed. The Wildlife Trust's conservation director Brian Evesham said the houses would be disastrous for its nature reserve on Flitwick moor. He said 'The nature reserve is of national importance and the most significant wetland for wildlife in Bedfordshire'. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 4 February 2000)

The Wildlife Trust does not shy away from emotive language, as with describing the impact of developments as being disastrous or describing birds as endangered.

Figure 4.9 Link between issues and village in all newspapers 1995-2000



The initial temptation to describe the professional conservation view as factual and the view of local residents as emotive would be misleading. In the article below the Wildlife Trust spokesperson describes two birds – the woodcock and the water rail – as endangered. But only three bird species in the UK are recognised as endangered by the International Union for Nature Conservation and Birdlife International, and none of these are found in Bedfordshire (RSPB, 2002). In the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' list of *Birds of Conservation Concern*, the woodcock and the water rail are on the second tier, which is the amber list of species that experienced 'moderate decline' in the period 1970-1995. Hence, it can be argued that the Wildlife Trust puts the most favourable slant on species conservation status in order to assist its case:

> Plans for 250 houses next to Flitwick moor nature reserve were blasted at the public enquiry, with the Wildlife Trust wanting the area declared greenbelt to safeguard its future... and endangered birds such as the water rail and woodcock could be at risk from cats. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 18 February 2000)

The Wildlife Trust and other professional nature groups clearly articulate the potential threat development causes to wildlife . In contrast, while one local residents group mentioned the proximity of a development to a Site of Special Scientific Interest, they were unable to demonstrate how this would harm the site. By contrast, the Wildlife Trust explained in layman's terms the threat to a bird species of a development adjacent to a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Wildlife Trust also articulated how changes to the water table caused by the development raised problems:

> Brian Evesham, conservation director of the Trust, feared the estate could have a disastrous effect on the reserve if it gets the green light. He said a series of surveys of the site since late last year had confirmed its importance – and even revealed some new species which no one knew about. There are water rails in the reserve which is the only breeding site for them in Bedfordshire. They are a fairly stupid bird and would just crouch down if attacked by cats from the new homes. And we have rediscovered a moss which has not been seen on the site since the 1880s. Also a red and black beetle which is new to Bedfordshire. This is one of only ten places in the country where it lives. Mr Evesham said 230 kinds of insect had been identified in a single day... Mr Evesham said the proposed estate would lead to damage to the reserve from increased numbers of people, dogs and cats despite a 150m buffer zone included in the plans. Water levels on the moor could also be disturbed in the future. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 19 May 2000)

References to rare species of beetle or rare mosses are not raised in any of the lay viewpoints about wildlife and housing development. They would also be unlikely to be raised by the media without the Wildlife Trust or other professional environmental group with paid staff feeding them this information. Notably, for example, there was only one newspaper article without a direct link in the article to one of the professional environmental groups that mentioned a rare species that is not well know to the general public (the Pignut plant). When local residents mention rare species they appeared unaware of their status, lumping them in with common species. Hence, species that are of conservation concern, such as the barn owl, are listed next to those that are not, such as deer. In lay reports, visually appealing species, particularly mammals like the water vole or bird species like the Kingfisher, tend to get more attention. The water vole is the subject of its own biodiversity action plan, but with over one million in the UK it cannot be described as endangered (HMSO, 1995). Similarly, the Kingfisher is on the amber list for bird of conservation concern, having experienced 'moderate decline' in the period 1970-1995 (RSPB, 2002). But what articles about these species offer is an opportunity for readers to empathise with birds and animals.

As expressed in the example below, lay reports have a tendency to portray wild animals and people as sharing the same fate - of having their solitude shattered. Professional nature conservationists and environmental journalists often dismiss these 'fluffy animal stories', yet, as Burgess (1993) argues, such views deny people an opportunity to empathise with animals, which is what these stories enable them to do:

> Homeowners believe the scheme will shatter the solitude of their area and drive out birds and other animals. Builder John Groom who has lived at Park Hill for 23 years said At least 20 species of birds come to feed in his garden including greenfinches, blackcaps and tits. A barn owl and a deer have also been seen in the area. John said 'They are all going to disappear. If anything should be a conservation area it should be this. Little spots like this are not made by man they are made by nature. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 23 December 1999)

In contrast to Wildlife Trust views, residents groups and individuals commonly exhort the public to act – to write a letter of objection, contact a councillor, come to a public meeting. But, despite the calls for activism, non-professionals in nature conservation have difficulty recognising the indirect effects of

developments. It is obvious that if a plot of land is covered in concrete it will lose its nature conservation value. But the impact on a river corridor and on particular species is a more subjective matter:

> The first planning application to build an estate between Norse Road and Renhold was turned down, one reason being the water voles in the brook. Crossing the brook with heavy vehicles could lead to an unacceptable if not total loss of these animals. This brook is also used by kingfishers and other birds, which could well disappear, leading to a possible ecological disaster here. Site interference with existing damage could well lead to localised flooding. Save our wildlife by opposing this development. (Letter in *Bedford Times and Citizen* 27 November 1998)

Environmental groups without paid staff were the only ones to make direct comparison between the value of development activity and the value of wildlife. They invited readers to decide which is more valuable and what should go ahead. This contrasts with Wildlife Trust views on Flitwick Moor (above), which never questioned the economic or social need for housebuilding:

> If the western bypass is built and the floodgates are opened to development in North Bedfordshire what do you think will happen to your town centre traffic then? Do you want all this development as the price for the destruction of the water meadows of Kempston. (Letter to *Bedford Times and Citizen* 20 August 1999, written by the Chair of Action for Rural Kempston, writing about development between Bedford and Kempston)

Although articles that mention wildlife are not as common as those that concern traffic or community facilities, the breadth of issues discussed within this subheading is greater. Moreover, the variety of viewpoints expressed about the conflicts and opportunities for wildlife associated with new housing development illuminates the often ambiguous relationship actors have with the natural world. This wide range of approaches to the natural world is exemplified in clips from articles below. On the one hand, there is a desire to allow a site to develop naturally. Nature free from human intervention is a vision most professionals in wildlife groups in lowland England would dismiss out of hand, yet it occurs in many articles. This 'wilderness' ideal is oddly juxtaposed with the need to preserve human features, like hedges, and the need to actively manage the site by tree planting:

> South Beds District Council officers are looking at ways to develop land next to the school and have just produced a draft of their ideas. They plan to develop a nature reserve on 2.05 hectares of the plot. It became a county wildlife site in 1991 and will be allowed to develop naturally. If

> the proposal goes ahead, the council plans to keep the hedges currently on the site and put up a fence around the rest of the land, which will be taken under the wing of the Beds wildlife trust. More trees could also be planted. The rest of the land will be used for 70 houses. (*Dunstable Gazette* 23 May 1996)

Overall, the direct and indirect threats to wildlife caused by housing development are strongly contested. These contested viewpoints strongly reflect different actors views of nature, particularly the split between those with a professional and those with a lay understanding of wildlife value.

Greenbelt, landscape and open space

Press coverage of the debate about preserving the greenbelt is again relatively unsophisticated. The greenbelt is presented by councillors, MPs and environmental groups as something that should be preserved without any reasoned justification. The purposes of greenbelts are clearly spelt out in Planning Policy Guidance 2 (DoE, 1995b). These include: preventing neighbouring towns merging into one another, preserving the setting and special character of historic towns, safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and to check unrestricted sprawl. In press coverage greenbelt designation often appears as part of a long list of reasons why housing development should not be accepted. The following quote from David Mandle MP is typical of many from councillors, MPs and environmental groups: "Sir David said the additional 21,000 houses were 'not necessary and dangerous and the greenbelt must be preserved' " (*Dunstable Gazette* 12th January 2000). As for broader landscape concerns, there is of course overlap between landscape and wildlife concerns. Individual trees, woodlands and hedgerows are important visual components of the landscape and have wildlife value. Not surprisingly, wildlife, landscape and public access to the countryside are commonly linked in residents' minds:

> Plans to build 64 homes in Stotfold's last remaining meadow are being challenged. ...An environmental protest was staged at the entrance to the meadowland on Sunday in a bid to save the 130 year old sycamore tree which residents believe would be lost if developers move in. A petition with more than 500 signatures so far has been drawn up which also points to Queens Street meadow's natural beauty and the knock on threat of traffic congestion. Sue Greetham of Queen Street Stotfold said: 'The major concern is they want to destroy a meadow that is a haven for wildlife. Sixty four houses would make the area quite cramped and the

> Kingfisher Walk which passes by the meadow will lose its rural setting and become bleak'. (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 28 July 2000)

Often it is not clear from resident and environmental group objections to housing schemes whether it is the visual quality of trees or hedges they value most or their contributions as wildlife habitats, or a mixture of the two. In areas outside the greenbelt – for example, the area of Mid Bedfordshire covered by the *Biggleswade Chronicle* – landscape and open space are much more prominently reported than county-wide. Perhaps this is explained by councillors and environmental groups employing other arguments, such as the value of landscape and open space, in the absence of the greenbelt designation. There also seems to be an interest amongst newspapers journalists to report landscape as an environmental issue. Whatever the cause, landscape comes across as a major component in objections to housing development, as illustrated by plans to develop the Morgan Matrock site:

> Plans to build 60 houses on the site of a disused factory close to the Sandy Hills has caused outrage among Sandy residents. The site, formerly home to Morgan Matrock, lies in an area of outstanding natural beauty, crossed by the Greensand Ridge Walk and is one mile from the Sandy to Everton road with access along a narrow tree-lined lane. (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 27 August 1999)

There is only one example, taken from an inspector's report of a sophisticated analysis of the role different components play in a landscape and why they should be retained.

> A government planning inspector has blocked plans for a housing development on Dunstable's Railway Triangle... The proposal would involve building on the area allocated for open space by extending some 50 metres beyond the defining hedgerow. This is an attractive feature which complements the semi rural nature of this open space. The hedge would be enveloped by housing development with the prospect of it being foreshortened or breached. (*Dunstable Gazette* 30 October 1997)

One surprising feature of the coverage of landscape, greenbelt and open space was the lack of pictures to accompany the stories. While maps and plans were sometimes taken from council and developer produced documents, photographs areas about to be affected were rare. This was the case across all topics but it was anticipated that landscape and perhaps wildlife would generate most photo opportunities. There were insufficient pictures to begin an analysis of their content.

Housing numbers

Reports of increased housebuilding in the countryside have an obvious appeal for journalists and editors at local newspapers. As they seek to increase readership, depicting a worsening threat is more newsworthy than news showing a decreasing threat. Berger (2001), who examined accident and crime statistics, showed that when the media do present quantitative data depicting trends in threatening phenomena, they do so to enhance visions of a worsening condition and to dampen improvements. Housing numbers were seen as a worsening trend, although they were shorthand for other issues. People reading articles about increased housing numbers being allocated to Bedfordshire by central and regional government will assume this has a range of negative impacts on traffic, wildlife and landscape. Less tangible concerns are often expressed by residents in villages or market towns, who wish to keep living in a settlement of that size and character. As the Chairman of CPRE's Bedfordshire Branch, Martin Towlson, has said: "The future of the county's small towns and villages is at serious risk with many threatened by being absorbed into new swaths of suburbia" (*Leighton Buzzard Observer* 2nd November 1999). As Alf Murphey, the Chairman of The Consortium put it:

> We want to preserve rural and village life and feel that 55,000 new homes in Bedfordshire would destroy rural life irreversibly'. Consortium chairman Alf Murphey added 'We say no to all these houses. It's our right to live in villages. Why should we have our rights taken away from us (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 16 June 2000)

Housing numbers articles are often linked to the idea of sprawl, that high levels of development will result in characterless, unplanned, low-density urban development, whose layout and location is poorly planned in relation to existing settlements. Indications of resistance to characterless large development occurs in various articles:

> The identikit development will contain the same sort of houses the giant Westbury group is building everywhere else in the country which means that the new estate will be identical to dozens of others. This is in direct contrast to the government's own instructions for more individuality and has led to a stinging rebuke from local authorities. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 8 February 1998)

The negative effect of sprawl is highlighted in coverage of the Countryside Agency's Character Assessment of Bedfordshire:

> The report praises our attractive towns... but then puts down Marston Vale before adding [that] the county's main towns have sprawled together

> leaving hardly any natural habitat for wildlife. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 11 June 1999)

The Countryside Agency is however the only body to place sprawl in context with other process of rural change, such as agricultural intensification.

Just as the Council for the Protection of Rural England has done most at the national level to move the issue of urban sprawl up the policy agenda, this is a major concern In Bedfordshire when new developments are planned:

> Bedfordshire spokesperson Edward Bean said 'There are not many sites like the Storage Depot which can accommodate such a big development and certainly there is an argument which says that concentration on one site might save other areas from over development. But we don't want to see this new town sprawling into Houghton Conquest or other villages, that is the real worry'. (Bedfordshire on Sunday 21 March 2000)

But it is not just specific proposals that raise fears, for much of the housing numbers debate centres around projecting trends into the future. Illustrative of this, in an article on housing numbers in *Bedfordshire on Sunday* the CPRE present a 'nightmare' scenario where rural Bedfordshire becomes part of London:

> In total 64,000 new houses could be built in Bedfordshire by the year 2016 - 'a housebuilding rate never before seen in the county. There are also plans to link Bedford, Milton Keynes and Northampton in a housing triangle. With Bedford already linked to Luton by this time because of the 60,000 plus homes and massive development already underway in Hertfordshire, the four towns could become part of Greater London by 2100. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 12 December 1999)

While the environmental groups CPRE and The Consortium focused a considerable resources on housing numbers, the district councils and the County Council focused most media attention on this issue. A typical example of the local reluctance to accept high housing targets, as exemplified in the quote below:

> A new report which claims 64,00 more houses should be built in Bedfordshire has been slammed by County Hall... Richard Payne, the Council's executive member responsible for the environment said 'The panel's proposals are totally unrealistic for Bedfordshire. At least half of these houses will have to be built on greenfields. This would be an area one third the size of Bedford and Kempston'. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 15 October 1999)

Links are often made between individual developments and the housing numbers debate. Large developments are seen to set a precedent, with approvals often perceived as the thin end of the wedge. For example:

> A decision to build 50 houses in Cranfield could open the floodgates to new development in the village it is feared... projects mooted in the past have included 350 houses at the airport and 400 at Holme farm. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 28 June 1998)

The debate over housing numbers avoids a more rounded debate on what kind of settlements we want to create, on government policy that encourages migration to the South East or on the need for affordable housing in rural areas. Despite 'environmental' messages within the debate, the views expressed quickly turn to a 'not in my back yard' response to new development. While understandable, this does little to further the cause of those concerned about new housing either in local government or in environmental groups.

Allotments

Some of the most bitter opposition to housing occurred when new homes were proposed on allotments. The number of articles, the length of articles and the strength of feeling expressed was greater here than when developments of a similar size were proposed on other land uses, such as agricultural land or other public open spaces:

> Allotments could be swallowed up by housing. Leighton allotment holders could be turfed out if a proposal in the South Beds District Plan is confirmed. The Weston Avenue Allotments are under threat from proposals to change the planners designation of the site... Brenda Wainer who has held a plot at Weston Avenue for five years said. 'We would all be very upset if we had to loose our allotments. People use these plots because the are so convenient. If they were moved somewhere else most of us wouldn't be able to get there'. (*Leighton Buzzard Observer* 22 June 1999)

Friends of the Earth were the only established environmental group to speak against the development of allotments. This perhaps reflects the urban bias of the group's membership, which emerged in interview compared to that of other established groups such as CPRE:

> Allotment holders spokeswoman Joan Cooper said 'money isn't everything. We want to stay where we are and will be stating our case at the enquiry'. The objectors have the backing of the Labour group on the council and the south Beds branch of Friends of the Earth. FoE co-

> ordinator Gill King said 'it is important for the town to retain its green spaces, especially in an area where there is considerable urban development. If anything its even more important to keep this green space in an area designated for urban sprawl'. (*Leighton Buzzard Observer* 5 October 1999)

Allotments were a strong political issue locally, which shows a divergence from the national media where they are all but invisible as an environmental issue. If developers wished to avoid guaranteed vociferous objections then it would be in their interests to avoid considering allotments as potential development sites. The fact that applications continued to be followed for these sites perhaps suggests that strong pubic opposition was not a concern for developers.

Other Issues

Flooding became an increasing important issue during the study period. It presents a visually appealing story opportunity for newspapers, with pictures of local residents standing in wellingtons on the site of proposed developments. The increased interest in flooding relates to national trends, where the issue has gained significance, culminating in a new Planning Policy Guidance Note specifically about development on flood plains (DTLR, 2001). Interest in the issue also relates to natural cycles, with floods reminding all groups of areas prone to flood. Interest has been particularly intense for the proposed developments at Kempston near Bedford that are on the flood plain of the River Ouse. As an issue, flooding was most commonly raised by environmental groups and occasionally by councillors. Flood risk also created an opportunity to renew media interest in stories that had perhaps become 'old news':

> ... with government instructions to provide more houses in Bedford, it is feared flooding may become a regular occurance as homes go up on the flood plains. Ivar Assinder, leader of Action for Rural Kempston said 'building near the floodplains anywhere in the county is absolutely and totally unacceptable'. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 3 December 2000)

Archaeology was rarely mentioned in newspaper articles about housing developments. There is only one case of independent input from NGOs in these articles, with newspapers depending almost entirely on views given by the archaeology staff at Bedfordshire County Council. Plans to build on a Bronze Age graveyard near Bedford received significant coverage, perhaps because of national interest in ancient graveyards in several popular television programmes. Occasionally

wildlife and archaeology issues are linked, for example a field network in Wilstead that had been farmed since the Bronze Age is also valued for wildlife. Occasionally the issue of contaminated land is raised in the press. This has usually been in connection with some of the large sites that used to have military uses. The low priority given to this issue probably has two causes. Firstly, most brownfield sites in the county are uncontaminated, with sites from traditionally non-ground polluting industries, such as milling and brewing, as well as the closure of some high tech industries. Secondly, contaminated land only emerged as an issue with a handful of interviewees, with this research suggesting that officers, councillors and environmental groups are not actively concerned about this issue, nor in generating news stories for the media.

Finally sustainable development was very rarely mentioned. In each case it was mentioned this came from a councillor, MP or an inspector's report. In no instance did a journalist try to explain for readers why a particular development or level of housebuilding may or may not be sustainable. This supports material from interviews, where only three of the 50 interviewees mentioned sustainable development. One of these was a journalist who resented having sustainable development "rammed down our throats". This quote from Jonathan Sayeed MP is typical of the limited 'sustainability debate' in the local media

> The targets for new homes in our county are ridiculous and out of control. Any development has to be sustainable and there is no way this number of houses could be sustained with the current infrastructure we have. The government is talking pie in the sky and we have to stop them (*Leighton Buzzard Observer* 20 June 2000)

Similarly, Councillor Richard Payne of Bedfordshire County Council, commented on central government housing targets for the county:

> This flies in the face of all sustainable development principles and will lead to increased use of our already overloaded transport network as people are forced to commute to find jobs. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 15 October 1999)

Sustainable development also occurs in a list of reasons why development should not go ahead, in this case commenting on the use of the Morgan Matrock site in Sandy for residential development:

> Planning inspector Richard Ogier dismissed it on grounds that residential development would be unacceptably affected by any railway noise, would harm the character of the area and would not accord with sustainable development principles. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 2 July 2000)

As Smith (2001) notes, the national media has failed to use the term sustainable development in news stories about the environment, so it is not surprising the local media have followed this example.

The role of the journalist and editor

For Harrabin (2000), commenting on the national press, 'the environment' is a new issue for many editors, a great many of whom received their journalistic training in issues such as crime or politics. Decision-making on the reporting of environmental issues consequently appears to be more erratic, with the inclusion of reports seemingly dominated by the agenda of big pressure groups. This is a significant point, as it is based on the notion that many news stories on the environmental agenda are raising concerns over which there is little journalistic precedent. Verging on the conservative side, many editors are consequently reluctant to give space to a new issue until it has been verified as a valid news story by one or more other outlets. Another sign of this editorial conservatism is the simplicity with which most articles address issues. Housing developments have a range of impacts on the local and wider environment but most articles only addressed one or two issues. This trend is even stronger in the free papers compared to the bought newspapers, as shown in Figure 4.10 and Figure 4.11. This finding is similar to that of Franklin (1991), who found that the regional papers displayed most sophistication in their coverage, followed by weekly bought and finally weekly free papers. Similarly, Rydin and Pennington (2001) argue that the local media has a business as usual approach to its journalism, in an attempt to minimise the risk involved in generating new stories. It might even be that this offers one explanation for the low level of news stories about housing development at the beginning of the study period. It was only when editors saw how much coverage housing was receiving in the national newspapers and on regional television that they took the issue more seriously.

Figure 4.10 Number of environmental issues raised in articles Times and Citizen 1995-2000

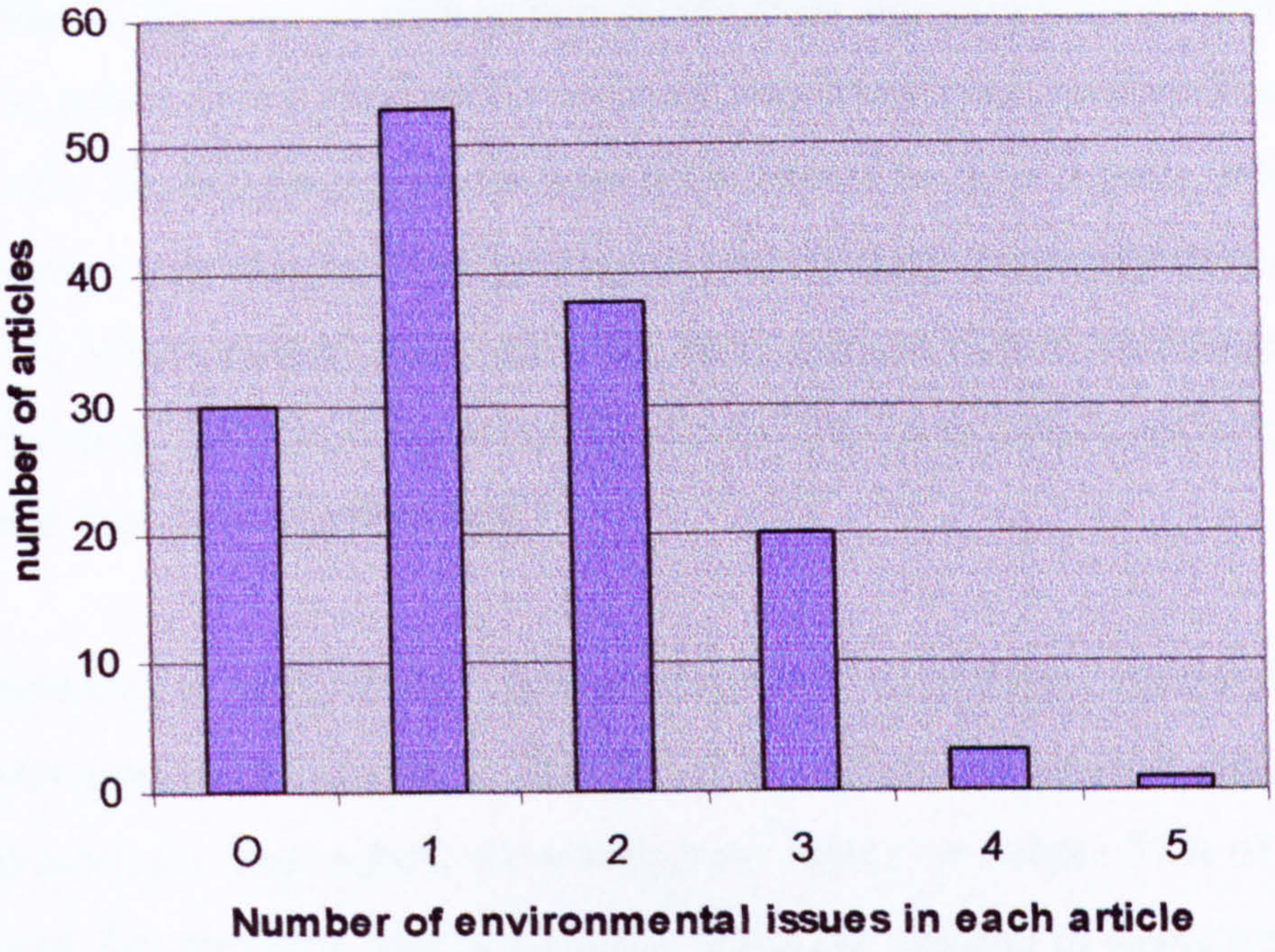
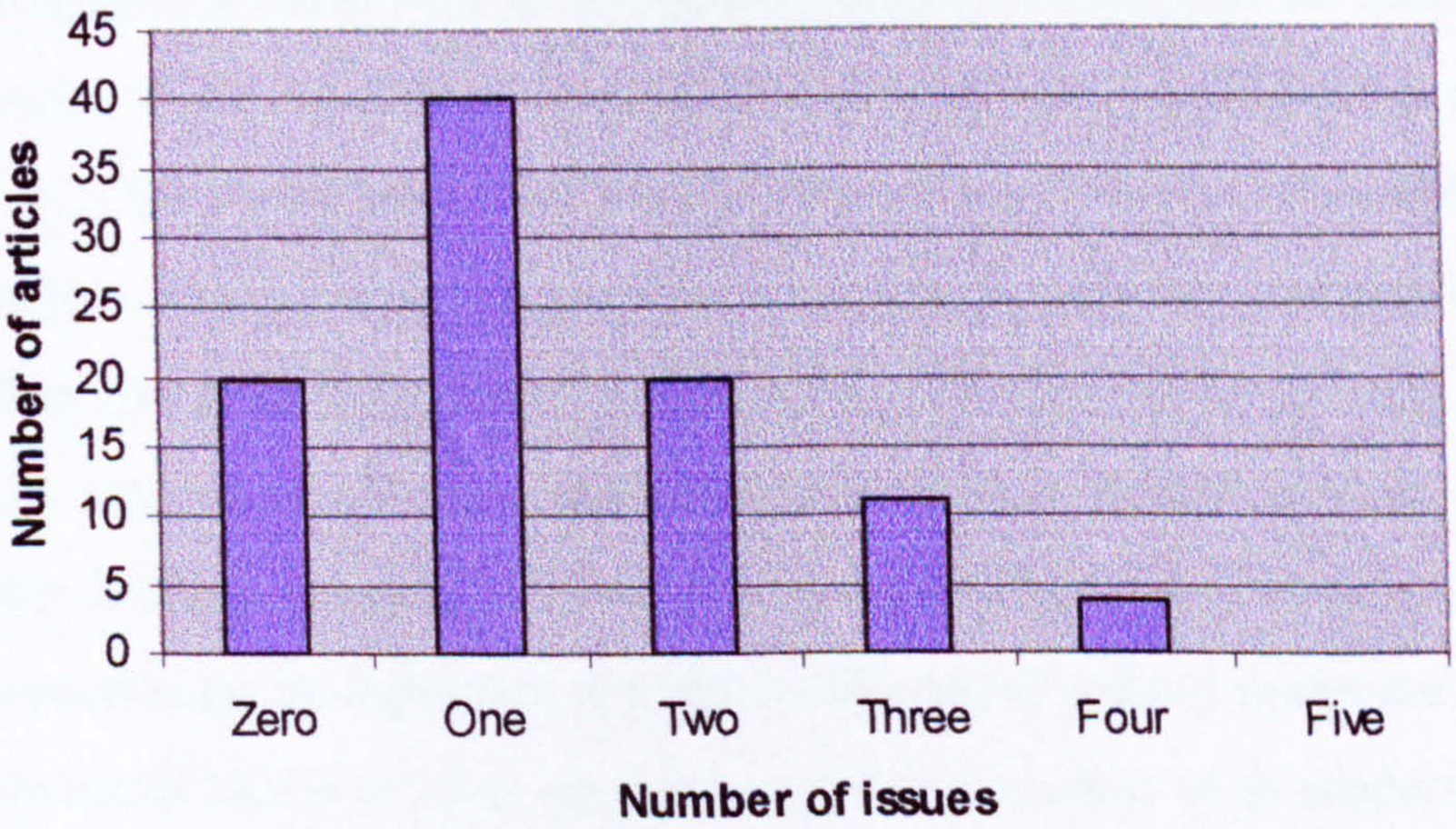


Figure 4.11 number of environmental issues raised in articles Dunstable Gazette 19995-2000



To consider how far this kind of influence might have had an effect, an item that was recorded for each article investigated was the name of the journalist. In this respect, it should be noted that there were no cases of environmental groups or MPs having a regular environmental column in any newspaper. There was also no use of one-off opinion pieces, with the result that all the articles that were recorded had been written by journalists working for the newspaper. This means that consideration needs to be

given to the possibility that individual journalists influenced environment-housing reporting. This vision would be in accord with the work of Jordan (1993), who has shown a high level of influence by individual journalists or commentators, to the extent that Jordan viewed such writers as the most significant media source in changing public policy preferences, with an impact that was greater than NGOs or politicians. Yet this research is perhaps contradicted by MORI polls, which consistently show low levels of public trust in the media, with journalists trusted by only 18% of the population; a figure that has remained almost unchanged from 1983 to 2003 (MORI, 2003). Is a low level of public trust compatible with high levels of influence over policy preferences?

Unfortunately, in Bedfordshire, only a minority of newspaper articles are attributed to any individual writer, so making it difficult to address this issue in great detail. The only exception to this is the *Leighton Buzzard Observer*, where 57% of articles were attributed. For the other papers, typically about one-quarter of items were attributed, with the *Bedford Times and Citizen* at 32%, the *Dunstable Gazette* at 27%, and the *Biggleswade Chronicle* at 20%. *Bedfordshire on Sunday* stands well apart in this regard with only 4% of articles having an attributed journalist. Initially it was hypothesised that items with an attributed journalist would give an indication of the prominence of the issue to the newspaper. However, the very different editorial practices of the papers made this kind of comparison between newspapers meaningless. In the *Dunstable Gazette*, for example, only one journalist had written more than five attributed articles (Steve Sims). The style of his articles, while generally supportive of local residents is quite negative about the chances of them affecting decision-making. This was the newspaper with the lowest level of civic or environmental group input into stories, for this paper did not make use of environmental NGOs or civic groups to provide a context to its readers for local protests. Take the following extracts as examples:

> Bosses at Dunstable's largest employer ACD dropped a bombshell by announcing that the firm's extensive leisure facilities could be axed. A decision is expected within days but workers seemed resigned to losing the popular social club and bowling green as well as their football pitch and cricket pitches. One employee who leaked the shock news to the Gazette said 'I believe they want to sell the grounds for housing, but we were told it was greenbelt land and no one could build on it. Now they are

going to shut the area down and fence the whole thing off while they apply for planning permission'. (*Dunstable Gazette* 26 February 1997)

Furious residents fighting a proposed Houghton Regis housing development have won a temporary reprieve after an emotional outburst at a council planning meeting... However the prospect of the plans being thrown out looks bleak as the council has to meet its quota for new housing. (*Dunstable Gazette* 23 July 1997)

A public meeting to debate a controversial Dunstable housing development will take place at Lancot Lower School... Residents reluctantly accepted that damage limitation was the only option left to them and forwarded a list of measures to ensure any development was a sensitive as possible. (*Dunstable Gazette* 10 March 1999)

In contrast Elanor Wilson of the *Biggleswade Chronicle* provides readers with more factual information about a development, who the developer is, how long the public have to object to the development, what the officers' recommendations are, and so on. Her reports also dwell more on history and rural landscape. While an idyllic and pastoral image of the Bedfordshire countryside is portrayed in all the newspapers, it seems strongest in the journalists writing in the *Biggleswade Chronicle*.

Housing plans which threaten to strike at the heart of Sandy's heritage seem set to go ahead. It would destroy the charming country character of the town's favourite recreation area, a chorus of voices argued. (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 1 October 1999)

Planners have defended a scenic wooded lane which many fear would loose its charm if housing were built at its bottom... But Sandy Lane is not out of the woods yet as advice from expert officers was to grant consent. The decision must first be endorsed by the planning policy committee of Mid Beds District Council – and there is a chance the applicants will appeal. There is strong feeling among councillors and members of the public that the serenity of Sandy Lane, which lies outside the built up 'footprint' of Sandy in an area of 'Great Landscape Value' should be preserved. (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 22 October 1999)

In contrast Mark Lewis at the *Bedford Times and Citizen* provides a combative tone in his articles, with a strong use of militaristic language. Conflicts over individual applications and housing numbers are battles, protected species are facts green campaigners use to arm themselves, and negative proposals are 'blasted' by opponents. The number of journalists who make their presence felt in the Bedfordshire newspapers is too small to assert conclusions with too much confidence, but there is a sense that female journalists give more attention to the loss of

countryside and how it affects people, while male journalists give extra attention to the conflicts in the story:

> Green campaigners have declared war in the fight to save a wildlife haven from developers. Plans for 250 houses next to Flitwick Moor nature reserve were blasted at the public enquiry. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* [Mark Lewis] 18 February 2000)

> Green campaigners are battling to save a wildlife haven from developers, armed with new information about rare birds and insects living there. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* [Mark Lewis] 19 May 2000)

> Campaigners battling to save rural Bedfordshire from urban sprawl took their fight to the top on Tuesday. Protestors handed a petition into 10 Downing Street, slamming plans for more than 55,000 new homes to be built in the county by 2016. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* [Mark Lewis] 16 June 2000)

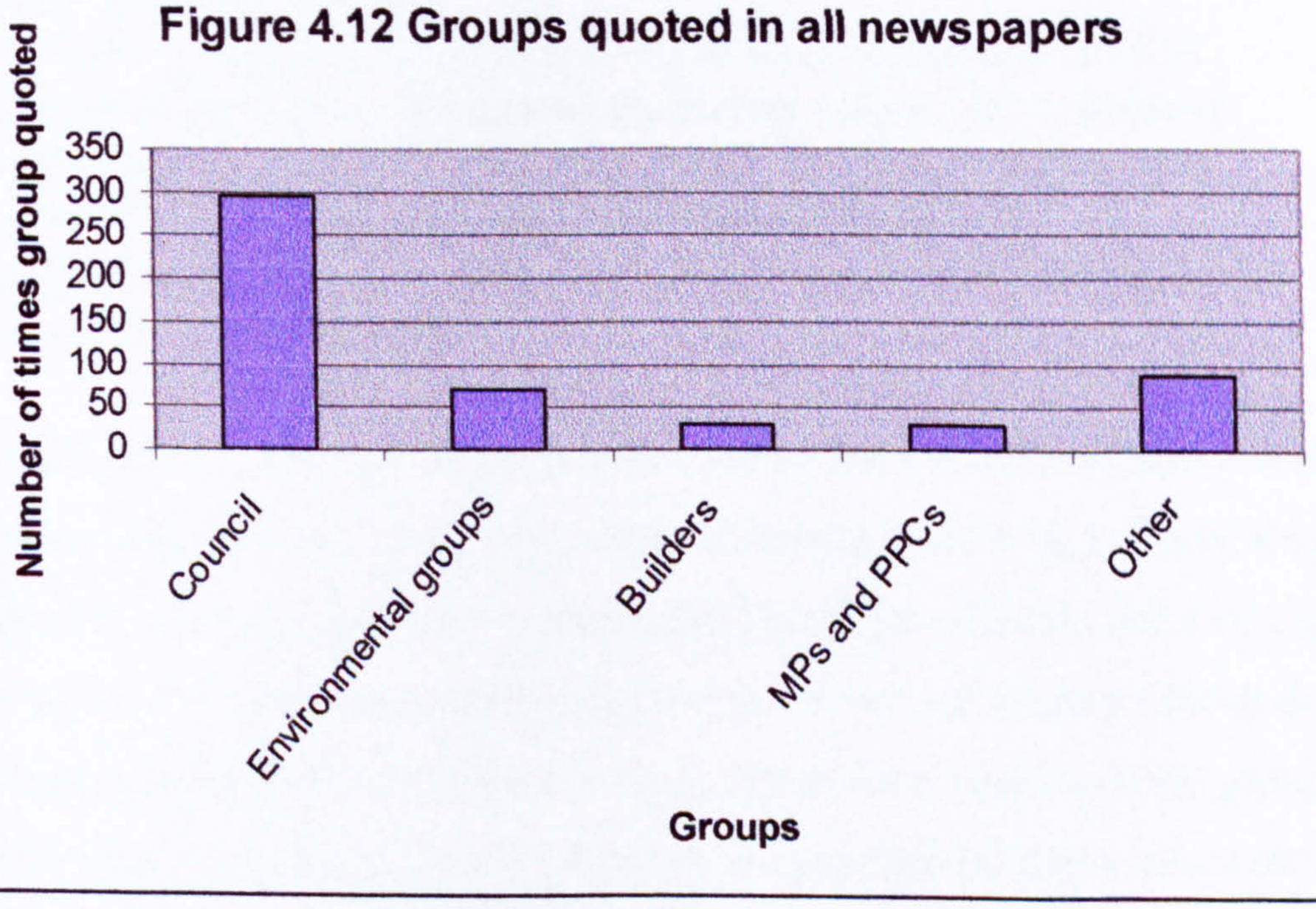
What recording journalists name over the six year period did provide is the impression that all newspapers experienced high staff turnover. Different journalists therefore affected the way housing and the environment were addressed in the media. Did a more combative approach lead to more confrontational campaigns in the *Times and Citizen* area? Did the fatalism of the *Dunstable Gazette* lead to a greater willingness to compromise and did the vision of rural Bedfordshire presented in the *Biggleswade Chronicle* focus and confine the debate to this area? Here we return to the reciprocal relationship discussed earlier where newspapers influence their readership and the readership influences newspaper coverage. Despite differences in the style and tone, the overall picture is supportive of environmental groups and against a pro-development stance. There were no instances of individual journalists who seemed more supportive to the case for more housing development.

The coverage of different actors in the media

One of the features recorded from each newspaper article was the presence of a quote or viewpoint expressed from a named individual or organization. Using quotes signifies that that statement belongs to someone other than the reporter. Tuchman (1972) argues that, in news discourse, sources become the validators of different truth claims the news writers cite. In this context, Tuchman (1972) stresses the importance

of the inter-organisational relationships between news companies and other social groupings. For Hall and colleagues (1981) powerful sources become over-accessed by journalists and, as a result, they become primary 'definers' of key issues. In this way, media statements are portrayed, wherever possible, as being grounded in 'objective' or 'authoritative' statements from 'accredited' sources. This means constantly turning to accredited social representatives of major social institutions: MPs for political topics, employers and trade union leaders for industrial matters, and so on. There is, therefore, a heavy dependence by journalists on a limited number of official and legitimised sources. These are drawn from personal contacts (Fairclough, 1995). Viewed in a Bedfordshire context, a quantitative analysis of the use of the media by the three groups examined here reveals the dominance of the local authority viewpoint. Representatives of local authorities were quoted 294 times in the 667 items examined here, compared to only 72 times for environmental groups and with even fewer citations of MPs, builders and other groups, as shown in Figure 4.12.

Figure 4.12 Groups quoted in all newspapers



This level of reporting was not constant between newspapers, with *Bedford Times and Citizen* coverage giving more attention to the views of environmental groups than the average. In contrast the *Dunstable Gazette* contains only one citation from an environmental NGO compared to 50 from local authority officials.

This does not match the hierarchy Tuchman (1972) described, in which higher status sources of government, industry and business are given preference. In the

Bedfordshire case a prominent role for business and industry is not found (Tuchman's classification does not have a role for NGOs). Not everyone gets to be in the news and the way actors are represented can be divided into what someone said, a news source, what someone did or what happened to them. Those whose position gives them 'authority', such as politicians, may be newsworthy because of what they say, while others may only be newsworthy through their actions (organising a public meeting, organising a petition) or when something happens to them (victims by losing an open space, their home being flooded, etc.). Those not holding 'top' down or establishment views of the world, i.e. those individuals at the 'bottom' are rarely used as news sources. When they are represented, it is primarily to ask for their reaction to a topic. As Fairclough, (1995, p49) observed:

> ... the narrowness and inherent conservatism of the network of legitimate sources can partly be attributed to the ways in which the media are economically embedded in and dependent upon the status quo in terms of ownership and profitability.

To quote Bell (1991, pp194-195):

> ... virtually everyone who appears in the news is named and labelled. How stories label actors illuminates their news values. News stories do not take time out to describe their characters. The face to face narrator may introduce his story with whole sentence description of characterisation. The news story characterises its actors in passing, within the flow of telling the action.

Protests against new housing is an issue with conflict and controversy, that affects a large number of people and whose magnitude of impact is often high. There are also clearly identified institutional targets, particularly local government, and a strong local relevance. All these issues are highlighted by Oliver and Manley (2000) as making media coverage of an event more likely. Therefore, environmental groups should find it easier to gain press coverage for housing than for many issues on which they campaign, such as climate change. Despite the national expertise of environmental NGOs in harnessing the media, most notably Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, little of that media skill seemed to exist at the local level. If anything national media work by national environmental NGOs seemed to hamper local campaigning work. As an illustration, national director of CPRE Tony Burton directly contradicted local branch Chairman Martin Towlson, indicating a lack of communication between head office and county branches within the organisation. The

local press dealt with this 'own goal' more sympathetically than similar communication breakdowns involving council officials:

> CPRE's assistant director Tony Burton said 'The death of predict and provide planning for housing, combined with new requirements to make the best use of urban land and improve density and design in new developments is an historic breakthrough in planning policy. It will bring enormous relief to the countryside and help regenerate the towns'. Mr Burton's comments are a major shift from earlier warnings made by the branch chairman of CPRE's Beds Branch Martin Towlson who said 'the future of the county's villages and small towns is at serious risk, with many threatened by being absorbed into a new swathe of suburbia covering tens of square miles'. It could turn out they are both right. The South East in general may be under less housing pressure, but our area could see a large amount of new building for many years to come . (*Leighton Buzzard Observer* 14 March 2000)

Only two environmental groups – Action for Rural Kempston and The Consortium - displayed a sustained media profile. In Chapter Six, several environmental and civic groups experienced difficulty in dealing with the media. They ascribed this to problems in answering media queries while at work. However, the evidence suggests that groups with retired members and paid staff managed little better. Only two instances were recorded of groups carrying out environmental protests, one an ad hoc group of residents in Stotfold protesting about the removal of a mature tree and meadows. This involved a group of residents standing by a large banner. The second was again a group of residents, town councillor and local dignitaries who marched through Sandy with placards. The local press typically underplayed conflicts in the local community and emphasised conflicts between different fractions of the council, between officers and members, or between county and district. The only occasions where splits were promoted was when a housing site was seen as causing problems in its current state. Examples included a scrap metal yard, derelict land and children's play areas that attracted 'anti-social behaviour'. In these instances, views were expressed for both residents who wanted to stop a development and those who wanted it to go ahead. All of these issues concerned small-scale developments, with no indications of division in the community over large-scale proposals, such as the 500 houses at Kempston, Biddenham, Elstow or Stanbridge. This pattern fits that reported by Tichenor and associates (1980), who found that the media in smaller, more homogeneous communities tends to downplay conflict within the community ,

whereas the media in larger, more diverse communities did not shy away from conflict.

Surprisingly house builders of all sizes appeared rarely in the local press. Builders may be aware that newspapers reach relatively few housebholds and therefore feel that their time is not well spent in engaging with the media. While builders may be correct in assuming that spending energy on the local media for routine planning applications is not an efficient use of their time, they did not seem to behave differently when applications generated considerable conflict. They very rarely tried to present a positive view of their activities, such as providing local jobs or helping maintain the viability of shops and services in villages through new housing investment. They also seemed unwilling to expend effort to counter arguments put forward by residents, councillors and environmental groups about the negative impacts of their developments. It is unclear why this was the case. One explanation may be a lack of interest in what builders have to say by the media, as one journalist suggested in interview:

> Interviewee: We get loads of press releases from developers. They all go straight in the bin. We carry hard news, we don't carry advertising publicity.
> AC: Are you aware of differences in the environmental attitudes of smaller companies compared to volume builders?
> Interviewee: I can't say that I am. But probably that's because I don't have a lot to do with either really. I'm just looking at the planning application and how it's going to affect our readers.

Small and medium sized local building companies seemed unable to enlist the support of the press in the same way as other small business do. This is noteworthy, as the local media is otherwise very supportive of home grown Bedfordshire success stories in traditional industries, such as Jordans Mill. They also present the economic argument alongside the environmental argument when reporting controversial schemes, such as local garden centres wishing to expand or Boss Truck's relocation in Leighton Buzzard. Moreover, the local media appeared not to be pro-active in contacting housebuilding companies for their views. The apparent downplaying of the builder position even extended to identifying company involvement, for in the majority of articles the name of the developer was not mentioned at all. If they were mentioned, this was almost always as factual information, with no contextual or

historical messages about the firm. In no instance was a builder's conduct brought into question by using processes like twin-tracking, where two applications are submitted at the same time, one for negotiation, one to go to appeal if needed, or submitting applications just before the local plan review to avoid discussion of the issue during the local plan enquiry. There were also no reported instances of a builder's track record on environmental or site management issues, with no indication consequently being provided of what to expect from the company in the case of a new planning application. Set against this, the housebuilding companies appeared not to be pro-active in issuing press releases about their activities, which is a surprising feature for medium-sized and large companies.

Builders are not the only group who initiate planning proposals, other groups include private land owners and private companies, such as land agents who want planning permission granted but will not carry out building work themselves. It is these groups who face the strongest criticism in the press. Several reports portray these corporate or private speculators as greedy, carrying out activity that vandalises the countryside. If a site loses its statutory designation for wildlife, and is regarded locally as an eyesore, speculators see this as increasing their chances of gaining planning permission. For example:

> Plough the fields that matter. A designated wildlife site dating back to the Bronze Age was ploughed up by a farmer. The field off Luton Road Wilstead, is a prime site for development and applications have been received in the past to build 250-400 homes. Now councillors and environmentalists are worried that neighbouring fields could be ploughed. The site passed into the hands of Sharman & Trethewy two years ago... (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 28 January 1996)

In only one instance was a detailed feature article written on the role of builders and speculators in the development process. As a tool to engage the reader this journalist tries to enliven a dry planning issue by pitching the article as a contest between different business personalities:

> While the thought of having a 4,500 new town on Elstow Storage Depot raises fears about the future of rural life in the surrounding villages, for two massive business empires and an array of building developers the prospects for profit are enormous. Over the last three years the Marton Vale corridor stretching from Kempston in the North to Ridgemont in the south has been a battleground between two of the countries biggest commercial giants. In the red corner is National Power, which owns the

> 475 acre storage depot site. In the blue corner is London Brick, which hoped its similar proposals for a 3,000 home development between Marston and Brogborough would win favour. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 21 April 1996)

Other groups such as the regional government bodies, GoEast and SERPLAN, were only quoted once in all the articles examined for the whole study period. Statutory agencies, such as the Environment Agency, English Nature and the Countryside Agency, were only mentioned on a handful of occasions, and then usually to clarify a technical query, such as the legal status of a rare species or rules about building on floodplains. Estate agents were occasionally asked to comment as 'experts' about the future prospects for housebuilding in Bedfordshire. Government inspectors also appeared occasionally as experts, with quotes taken from written reports after a public enquiry. No newspapers made use of other kinds of experts, such as academics, which is perhaps surprising given the presence of Cranfield University in the study area.

All told, then, it is the relationship between the media and local government that merits most scrutiny. Although news workers and news audiences alike believe that institutional politics should be news, and that issues being debated in political institutions are newsworthy (Oliver et al, 2000), researchers generally concur that local government suffers from a bad press (Franklin, 1991). Franklin, for example, noted that the only occasion that West Yorkshire County Council received a good press during his study was when it was locked in conflict with central government. Similarly, in his analysis of the role of the local media in the controversial Community Charge, Deacon (1993) concluded that the local media was a key reason why local government won the media war with national government on the issue. In Bedfordshire also, quotes from national politicians and other national government appointees were almost always portrayed in a negative light, compared to those from local politicians. For example, in an article about the Crow Report, the government inspector was portrayed in a poor light by selecting comments from the Report that would most likely be viewed negatively by local people:

> One section of the report said, expansion of the towns into the countryside is the price for economic growth. And it also suggested that development could take place on greenbelt land if there was no other available space. County Council environment spokesperson Richard Payne said: 'The panel's proposals are totally unrealistic for Bedfordshire. At least half of

> these new houses will have to be built on green fields'. (*Dunstable Gazette* 20 October 1999)

In fact quotes from national figures are rare at all. The local media covers national announcements on housebuilding but the articles take their leads from local government and, to a lesser extent, environmental groups. The support for the local press described by Franklin seems to be part of the story in Bedfordshire as well, with the only coverage that can be described as consistently supportive relating to district and County Council objections to housing figures imposed by central government. For example:

> Time is running out for protestors to stop a massive housebuilding programme in Mid Bedfordshire. Up to 55,600 homes will be built in the area if government proposals go ahead. Councillors have warned the development would mean greenfield sites used because there is insufficient industrial land... Affected councils in the areas have set up a council's consortium Its chairman, Alf Murphey, is urging the public to register their protests by June 19th. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 21 May 2000)

This quote also shows the way politicians lend support to and encourage protest as a way to draw news attention to issues.

The bureaucratic nature of local government comes in for particular criticism, as with a children's play area in a new development in Biggleswade that remained fenced off for six months after it was built, which was blamed on bureaucratic incompetence on the part of the local council (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 12 October 1997). The local press are also keen to report instances of communication breakdowns with local government:

> A planning decision has become a complete farce as yet another council chief officer is forced to apologise. A planning application to build four luxury houses in Main Road Biddenham was refused under delegated powers by Bedford Borough Council's chief planner Daivd Bailey. But the planning department broke its own rules because the size of the site meant the decision should have been taken by councillors not just officers. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 20 September 1998)

The media seem more ready to take advantage of disagreements between different sections of local government than between conflicting views held by local residents or environmental groups. Difference between districts emerged in both the overall

distribution of development in Bedfordshire and the location of large developments close to the borders of two districts:

> Senior planners from two councils are waging a bitter war of words over a massive new town proposal for Elstow Storage Depot. Officers at Mid Bedfordshire District Council are understood to be angry that the 2,500 home development - most of which will count towards Bedford's ten year housing target set by government - could end up costing Mid Beds taxpayers a fortune. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 8 December 1996)

Yet the local press gives a considerable amount of space to councillors and officer to express their views. In more than three quarters of the articles featuring councillors, there are opinions by councillors, leaders of groups or committee chairs on specific planning applications. The same councillors names occur again and again. This fits with studies of the national press by Hannigan (1995), who found the national media repeated sources and loci in news stories. The public and the media expect ward councillors to have a view on even the smallest developments in their area. They also expect those with a decision-making role to have an opinion on schemes with wider implications. For Franklin (1991), in this way politicians and journalists are locked in a virtual symbiosis, since each has particular needs and aspirations that the other can meet. Unlike environmental groups and builders, councillors always seem willing to provide an opinion for the media and have up to date information about individual schemes. In most instances it appeared that the media was pro-active, in seeking quotes from councillors for a story. The need for the press to be pro-active has been suggested by Deacon (1993), who points to diverse media sophistication among local authorities. The journalists reported that While each of Bedfordshire's authorities nominally had a press office, the only comments to emerge from them were factual ones, such as stating that they had received an application from a developer and it would be discussed at a meeting on a given date. All this should not be taken to discount the possibility that politicians may wish to raise their own profile in the local community, to create a favourable climate of public opinion about a particular issue, to assess public reaction to a new policy, or to promote a favourable image of the local authority. The local press can serve invaluable functions in this regard, although not all politicians seemed aware of these opportunities or were convinced newspapers could achieve them. The County Council is a case in point, where Councillor Richard Payne is virtually the only county councillor to be reported on in the press.

Conclusion

The newspapers undoubtedly affect the way different housing issues and different groups are portrayed in Bedfordshire. They give preference to certain issues, such as the greenbelt, and all but disregarding others, such as the energy efficiency of housebuilding. Indeed, it could be argued that the media change the nature of environmental conflicts. In *Something in the Air*, for example, Blowers (1984) argued that the media had a more significant role than just highlighting issues like air pollution or dereliction associated with the actions of the London Brick Company:

> We may briefly consider the evidence for the pluralist ideal of responsive polity. As the conflict developed, so it became more open, and the contestants made increasingly energetic appeals to pubic opinion. The privileged access to officials and covert methods of pursuing objectives were no longer enough to ensure success for London Brick. The role of the media was crucial in this. (Blowers, 1984, p224)

The media therefore not only changed the issues being debated but also the way the debate was conducted.

One of the strongest common themes to emerge from a review of the role of actors and issues in the media is a feeling of fear about the future of the environment as a whole in Bedfordshire. Actors are often unable to articulate their concerns beyond a general concern about loss of countryside, open space, wildlife and traffic increases. Yet some visions for the future of Bedfordshire appear to be little short of apocalyptic as the countryside is submerged beneath an urban area that stretches from London to Northampton. Councillors and environmental groups view the cumulative impacts of development, without differentiating between damage caused by retail or industrial development and that from housing schemes. Housing projects appear not to be viewed by councillors, residents and environmental groups on a case-by-case basis, with a prevailing view that too much environmentally damaging development had been allowed in the past and now is the time to stop. This contrasts sharply with the approach taken by the statutory planning system, where each case is judged on its individual merits. Sometimes this fear spills over into a confrontational response by actors. This is exemplified by the following article from the *Leighton Buzzard Observer* (5 February 1998):

> Fiona Chapman joint leader of Mid Beds Borough Council. 'I'd ask you to remember when Milton Keynes decided to spread its boundaries before. We fought you then and gave you a bloody nose and we'll fight you

> again'. Fellow Mid Beds councillor John Doyle added: 'People don't want houses in Beds. People don't want houses anywhere and without consultation the whole thing becomes very frightening'.

It is in this political climate that housebuilders attempt to maintain a commercially viable business and perhaps adopt the precepts of ecological modernisation. These themes are explored in more detail in subsequent chapters.

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Chapter Five

Research Methodology

Underlying approach: critical realism

This research aims to discover if the environment is benefiting, in the ways described by ecological modernisation, when new rural houses are built in England. The approach taken to the research question is based largely in the academic tradition of critical realism. Essentially, critical realists seek to discover generative mechanisms or processes. In a critical realist approach there can be neither full determination nor complete problem closure. There are, however, recurrent contingencies and causal tendencies that can be identified and mapped, so as to render some explanations more powerful than others. For Bhaskar (1989), a key commentator on critical realism, the critical realist approach recognises that social structures: do not exist independently of the activities they govern; do not exist independently of agents' conceptions of what they are doing; and, may be only relatively enduring. A critical realist approach to power, for example, conceptualises it as the product of relatively enduring social processes. What does critical realism mean for rural housing in Bedfordshire? The social processes that lead to the current form of the land use planning system favour development interests with presumption in favour of development, right of appeal and privileged access to officials. This situation is not static. Changes to the planning system, such as the sequential test favouring brownfield sites or an end to the process of twin tracking, could tip the balance of power more favourably toward environmental objectors. A critical realist views as nonsense studying the social structures of the planning system as a set of 'scientific' laws that can be viewed objectively, independently from the activities of housebuilding, gravel extraction, or office development it seeks to regulate. Importantly, unlike a post-modern approach, critical realism allows for tentative conclusions to be drawn from the data collected. Some explanations for the lack of more environmentally sensitive house building are constructed as better explanations than others.

It should be recognised that there is no overall consensus within social science concerning research methods. Much research into community activism and environmental problems has taken postmodernism as a theoretical base for the research (Place, 1996; Maples, 1998). It is argued by proponents of postmodernism in environmental research that the features of environmental activism follow a post-modern design: transgressive, fragmented, peripheral, simultaneously local and global and antagonistic to modern political conventions. While this material has proved valuable in informing this research, a post-modern approach is not adopted here. The extreme relativism of the postmodernist approach, that rejects the idea of real environmental problems in favour of competing worldviews, takes the environment out of environmentally concerned research. Despite this, as Pratt (1995) argues, postmodernism and critical realism have much to learn from each other. Realists could benefit from consideration of discourse, with a concern for language commonly lacking from realist research. Similarly postmodernists could benefit from the incorporation of structural inequalities into their research These views are developed by Blake (1999), who rejects the relativism of postmodernism and the overly mechanistic explanations that can be offered by realists, looking instead for a middle ground between these two viewpoints. By building on the work of Soper (1995), Blake identifies 'real nature' at the level of abstract physical, chemical and biological laws, which by definition have an internal structure that exists prior to, and unalterable by, human beings. By contrast, 'real society' involves human agency, activity, perceptions and imaginations. Thus, the interaction between nature and society creates, at the level of events, a series of social natures or dimensions of environmental concern.

Narrative in Social Science Research

Over the past 20 years, the popularity of narrative research in the social sciences is evident from an increase in publications having to do with narrative questions, phenomena, or methods (Ollerenshaw and Creswell, 2002). This does not mean a narrative is simply a report. It is directed by a purpose and possesses an internal argument. A narrative can be primarily descriptive, theoretical or conceptual. A narrative can be defined as "... the organisation of material into a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of content into a single coherent story" (Stone,

1979, p3-4). The researcher using the narrative approach attempts to understand what people mean when they discuss an event. This is achieved in part by interviewing individuals who are in some way connected with the event and can tell their story of it. By piecing together the story the researcher gains a better understanding of the events and experience of those who participated in it. The narrative's place in social science is not as secure as it once was. Faith in grand narratives became eroded in the late 19th Century as questions were raised about scientific rationality, technical progress and human rights. More recently, there has been a renewed interest in the narrative as cultural historians see that it could free people from domineering interpersonal relations (Iggers, 1997). Sayer (1992) also considers the role in narrative in social science research, taking a different approach to narrative than Iggers' cultural historical approach. He argues that a narrative approach is appropriate for accounts of concrete situations where there is considerable historical and geographical specificity and change. As we shall see in the next section there have been strong shifts in the way in which our ideas about housing in rural areas have changed in the recent past.

How does narrative relate to research on housing in Bedfordshire? Housing in rural England has its own narrative that has led to current policy conflicts. In the early part of the century up until the 1930s there was a concern by those in progressive social movements that more housing should be built in rural areas to relieve the terrible housing conditions endured by agricultural workers. Running contemporarily with this, from the 1930s onwards, was concern about unplanned urban sprawl manifesting itself in the formation of campaigning organisations like the Council for the Protection of Rural England (e.g. Lowerson, 1980). From late 1945 onwards the urgent need to provide cheap housing to meet the nation's need was the overwhelming policy priority, leading to the enlargement of many existing towns and the creation of new towns. After that urgent need was met, the priority given to housing as a policy area declined. The idea that housing threatens the nation's countryside peaked at periods when new housing allocations were being made due to changes in government policy in the early 1980s, in 1987-8 and from 1997 onwards. The pressure in the early 1980s can be related to three DoE circulars in 1980, 1984 and 1985 which promoted the need to support the needs of the development interests, particularly the House Builders Federation (Pennington, 1997) The pressure in the period 1987-8 was related to the significant fall in agricultural land prices and agricultural output between 1985-

7 and the lobbying of the then influential Country Land Owners Association for more land releases (Shucksmith, 1990) Are there new environmental narratives that link housing to regional or global environmental concerns? Wider environmental concerns about $C0_2$ emissions from housing or the social consequences of so many empty and substandard houses are just two issues currently being promoted by environmental and housing campaign groups. However, these have so far failed to capture the public imagination as key narratives in the way housing is conceptualised. This is despite government projects such as the Single Regeneration Budget, which provided funding in some areas for improvements to the housing stock, the Warm Homes Bill, promoted by Friends of the Earth, and the campaigns of the Empty Homes Agency and Shelter to reduce the number of vacant properties. If these narratives have failed to connect on a large-scale with the public, the media and policy-makers, what is the current narrative about housing in rural areas? At one level it could be simplified to a debate between protecting the environment and allowing economic development through new construction. It is not, however, quite so simple as one that pits environmental groups who oppose housing against developers who wish to build them. Environmental groups, such as the CPRE, have supported well-planned settlements through much of their history and in some instances still do. In this thesis, by focusing on the last five years in one English county, a snapshot is produced. That snapshot is really part of a much larger picture about changes in housing policy, changes in environmental concerns and the way in which the state intervenes to regulate private property interests. This research presents the local narrative of housing development in Bedfordshire. It takes disparate and sometimes conflicting sources of information to give a coherent account of how environmental concerns are reflected in new housing development.

The Value of the In-Depth Study in Research

Why choose in-depth study as a mode of academic enquiry? The in-depth study method offers a detailed analysis within which a broad range of processes and variables can be represented in a manner that is extremely difficult to replicate in a theoretical context. The in-depth study (which some analysts refer to as the case study) can be defined as an empirical enquiry that:

> ... investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. (Yin, 1984, p23)

As proposed by Mark Francis (1998, p6):

> A case study is a well documented and systematic examination of the process, decision making and outcomes of a project that is undertaken for the purpose of informing future practice, policy, theory and or education.

Case studies can provide a deeper understanding and a fuller contextual sense of the subject under investigation, and a foundation for the development of theory (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Another underrated advantage of the in-depth study is that 'real life' accounts of people and events enliven and animate what may otherwise be a rather disembodied and dry piece of academic research (Morton, 1997).

For most of the 20th Century the study of politics had its remit clearly defined. It revolved around issues and events in high politics: Parliament, Cabinet and Prime Minister, at the level of the nation state. The links between ecological modernisation and new rural housing could be assessed by an analysis at a national level of all relevant policy documents, media reports and interviews with national actors from government, the Environment Agency, the Housebuilders Federation, the CPRE, and so on. In this approach the case study would be Britain. Such a research undertaking, while no doubt giving interesting insights, would leave unresolved the question of policy implementation. Even assuming government officials, the Housebuilders Federation and the Environment Agency answered 'truthfully', it would be unclear how in touch they were with the situation on the ground. In addition, new developments in social science in the 1980s and 1990s suggest that such accounts would be partial in both senses of the word. The term 'new boundaries of the political' indicates the arrival of new political issues, and new forms of representation of issues, as well as the need to de-emphasise the nation state as the main object of political enquiry. This term indicates both the politicisation of issues previously considered private, such as gender and quality of life, and the withdrawal of the state's political intervention in fields of economic activity (Howard, 1994). Similarly, Gibbs and Jonas (2000) argue that the local scale is not only an appropriate point of analysis in environmental policy-making processes, but also a useful point of policy and political intervention. According to Gibbs and Jonas (2000, p310):

> ... it offers a terrain whereupon the interest groups mobilise, policy regimes begin to take shape, and the effects of regulatory processes become more readily apparent. It is at the local level where environmental policy regimes or other types of political regimes that incorporate or preclude environmental action can become fairly coherent identifiable as relatively self contained, if not closed systems.

These changes within social science opened the way for the study of politics at a regional, local and micro level.

The in-depth study provides a testing ground for the research hypothesis that ecological modernisation is affecting the way builders develop new rural houses. Yin (1984) holds that the case study has a distinct advantage over other research methods when 'how' or 'why' questions are asked about contemporary events over which the investigator has little or no control. Yet, as Yin (2003) points out, there are different types of case study. Firstly there is the question of whether to use single or multiple case studies. If multiple case studies are selected the may be selected to be as similar as possible so as to replicate each other (literal replication) or contrasting results for predictable reasons (theoretical replication). Case studies then may be subdivided into exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Exploratory case studies are where fieldwork and data collection are undertaken prior to the final definition of the study questions and hypothesis. Researchers follow intuitive paths but this research can be criticised as being sloppy (Yin, 2003). A descriptive case study will present a complete description of a phenomenon within its context An explanatory case study presents data bearing on a cause-effect relationship – explaining how events happen.

One approach for this study would be to take in-depth studies that have promoted themselves as environmentally sustainable or provoked particularly high levels of environmental interest. This would correspond to a best practice sample. Here a review of housing design using showcase green houses as case studies has been carried out by Marsh (1996). More recently, publications such as *Building for a Future* magazine, by the Association of Environmentally Conscious Builders, and *Clean Slate* magazine, published by the Centre for Alternative Technology, focus almost exclusively on best practice. Such publications helped inform this research on what was possible in terms of design. But the 'best practice' approach was not

adopted for this thesis, as the aim was to establish what was occurring rather than what was potentially within the reach of builders.

Similarly, while a number of enquiries that have looked at the local plan making process, assessing through this which actors were most effective in changing the document and how strongly the environmental message was taken on board (Adams and May 1992; Counsell 1998; Farthing, 1995, Fanning 1998), this approach was rejected here. Primarily this was because this approach ignores the significant number of planning applications that are proposed independently of the local plan making process. It also ignores groups that are not involved in the local plan process, but show a development interest at a later date. Farthing (1995) also points to the 'success' of many developers in obtaining land release at the local plan enquiry through informal negotiation, never appearing as objectors or supporters at the inquiry. Many studies into local plan making also do not follow through to the implementation of the document. If it is a stated aim of the local plan to confine new residential development to certain settlements, are the local planning authority successful over the lifetime of the plan in achieving that aim?

Rather than take the development of a document like a local plan as the boundary of the research, the unit of enquiry in this thesis is the county of Bedfordshire. Why select a whole English county? Cochrane (1998) argues there is a tendency within research investigating local power relations to begin with local government representatives and to respect local government boundaries. This makes some sense according to Cochrane, because there are important political and social institutions that take those boundaries for granted. This provides an opportunity to study interaction between the county level of government and district and town councils. In Bedfordshire there are three district councils and one county council. Despite their differences three districts and towns within the districts have much in common with each other, compared to, say, a similar sized town in the Brecon Beacons National Park. They also have important but identifiable differences related to attributes like greenbelt designation and transport infrastructure. The similarities and differences within the case study area make it attractive as an area for research. While there are of course features that are unique about Bedfordshire, it is not expected that these are so

particular that, if interviews were conducted in Buckinghamshire or Essex, it would be impossible to relate findings from Bedfordshire.

The period selected for the case study was five years. Quantitative material, such as press reports and planning data, were collected for the period 1995-2000. This period included the most recent review of the Bedfordshire county structure plan. It is assumed that, as ecological modernisation is a relatively recent phenomenon, if it were occurring in housing developments in Bedfordshire, evidence should manifest itself in this recent period. Not unexpectedly, many interviewees refereed to events before 1995-2000. This information was not discarded, for some schemes had been blocked or had yet to come to fruition, while many environmental conflicts, for example larger residential developments around Bedford, started long ago.

The selection of Bedfordshire has taken place partly by a process of elimination. I did not wish to study Hertfordshire, as my local involvement in environmental issues, could affect interviews. Berkshire, the subject of an extensive study led by Short in the 1980s (Short et al, 1986), is no longer a single county, having been split into individual unitary districts. This makes it unique among the English home counties and much of the conflict over housing development has centred over whether the last structure plan that occurred in Berkshire appropriately allocated housing numbers between the new unitaries. As for Buckinghamshire, rural planning issues had been studied extensively in the work of Murdoch and Marsden (1994). Concern to examine unexplored sites, as well as the possibility of potential interview fatigue, made Buckhamshire a less suitable site.

So what positive features make Bedfordshire a suitable site for an in-depth study? As stated earlier, there are variations in the policy environment, the most obvious of which is that much of the southern half of the county is designated as greenbelt. This affects the ease with which developers can gain planning permission. Additionally, Bedfordshire has experienced considerable population growth since 1950, with towns such as Leighton Buzzard specifically selected for expansion. Continued population growth in Bedfordshire in the 1980s and 1990s has inevitably led to local political conflicts and a feeling that some towns had their fair share of development. Differences in urban form have also developed, with Luton having a sharp urban/

rural boundary but Bedford having growing, suburbanised satellite villages. As well as this, housing is one of a number of environmental conflicts affecting Bedfordshire, the most obvious of which include mineral extraction, landfill, the East-West rail link, controversial road schemes including the Dunstable bypass through the Blows Down SSSI, plans for a large new stadium near Luton and the expansion of Luton airport. Hence, housing as an environmental policy issue is in competition with other issues. As local authorities and environmental groups have a limited time, they must prioritise issues they believe to be most important. Another factor in Bedfordshire was the relatively large number of planning applications submitted in the late 1990s, which gave many issues to discuss with developers, local authorities and environmental groups. Most development took the form of urban extensions near Bedford, medium-sized edge of town developments in Mid Bedfordshire or smaller developments of one-to-ten houses across the study area. A number of schemes are of sufficient size to warrant environmental impact assessments. This range of sizes in development provides the opportunity to tell if the environment is better incorporated into large, small or medium-sized schemes.

Compiling the in-depth study

In order to compile an in-depth study it is necessary to access material in a number of ways. One of the reasons for using more than one type of source material is to triangulate, as a means of verifying the validity of observations and meanings. Here, Yin (1984) identifies six sources of evidence that can be used in in-depth studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations and physical artefacts. In addition to these sources, Francis (1998) suggests the use of site visits, historical analysis, bibliographic searches and web searches. A small proportion of the data assessed in this research is quantitative, as with data on housing completions in different wards and by different companies. However, the majority of the material collected is qualitative. Social science researchers have largely concluded that these two perspectives should not be seen as mutually exclusive, rather the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches may be used together to result in a multi-method research design (e.g. Philo et al, 1998).

Qualitative methods are perhaps the fastest growing method employed in geographical research (Blake, 1999). While they have historical roots, particularly in the fields of anthropology and ethnography, their popularity in the mainstream social sciences reflects a dissatisfaction with the assumptions of positivism, the 'cultural turn', and the popularity of so-called postmodernist or post-structuralist epistemologies. Qualitative methods cover a wide range of methodological techniques. What qualitative researchers have in common is a desire to study the processes by which events, meanings and relationships are constructed in the social world. For the qualitative researcher validity does not rest on statistical representativeness. Validity instead rests on logical consistency, rigour and reflexivity at every stage of the research process (Blake, 1999). The different ways groups of actors – builders, environmentalists and local authority representatives – articulate concern for the environment is critically important. Their views of what represents an environmental issue, that needs to be addressed, is expected to affect their behaviour. These different constructions, and how they relate to actions, form an important component of subsequent chapters.

Stage 1

A review of land use planning policies was carried out analysing the district plan, structure plan, housing studies, Local Agenda 21 plans and any other policy documents that pertain to new housing developments. It was anticipated that local plans would be central documents for this study. The policy framework provided by a local plan is important in determining whether the local authority accepts the principles of ecological modernisation or has a very different construction of environmental issues. There may also be differences within documents, as the housing chapter is written by a different team to the countryside or environment section. Local plans also identify specific sites that are considered appropriate for development by the local planning authority during the lifetime of the plan. The local plan review process also provides an opportunity to determine who the key actors are within that local area; as housebuilders and environmental pressure groups with a desire to alter site decisions and the strategic framework for development respond to this document. The level of response by environmental pressure groups gives some indication of the strength and co-ordination of that sector. Similarly, the quality and volume of comments submitted by developers gives an indication of the level of

development pressure. However, as mentioned earlier, an analysis of local plans does not provide information about implementation as many developers promote schemes within the local plan that are never built while other developers promote schemes outside the local plan process. Similarly, over the life time of the plan the local authority may be unable or unwilling to get developers to comply to the local plan policies.

Stage 2

An evaluation of planning application data identifies the geographical spread of development pressure across a county. Geographical bias may be caused by landscape designations, such as the greenbelt or conservation areas. Geographical bias may also occur as developers ignore certain areas, where they have met resistance in the past. Whatever the objectives of the planning system, development control decisions remain the main mechanism for their implementation. These data were obtained from the County Council, which maintain a record of all planning applications.

Stage 3

A review of press coverage in the local authority areas 1995-2000. This gave an indication of the importance of housing in the local political arena in comparison with other environmental issues (Chapter Four). This relates to the work carried out by Blowers (1984) in Bedfordshire where increased media attention corresponded to different phases in environmental conflict. It also helps to draw attention to groups who should be followed-up for interview, such as environmental groups who are active in different kinds of development proposal.

Stage 4

The fieldwork continued by looking at the role of three main groups of actors - the local planning authority, housebuilding companies and environmental pressure groups. The approach to interviewing was based on grounded theory, to interview until no new information was forthcoming from the same group of interviewees (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the interviewee. They ranged in length from 25 minutes to two and a half hours. The interviews were carried out at a location most convenient to the interviewee. For most environmental groups this was home or in a community building, for all builders and

council officers it was a place of work. Elected councillors were interviewed at home, at council offices or occasionally in political party offices. It was my intention to interview each individual separately. In a few instances local environmental groups, government agencies and developers wished a colleague to be present. In approaching groups for interview a letter was sent to each interviewee explaining the nature of the research and saying that I would be following this up with a phone call a week later.

Interviews with Environmental Groups

I carried out 25 interviews with environmental groups. The purpose of interviewing the environmental groups was twofold. Firstly, environmental groups lobby various tiers of government and builders directly to affect housing. Secondly, they provide important insights into what is happening locally in terms of builders delivering green building measures. All the environmental groups approached agreed to be interviewed. One environmental group even telephoned and asked to be interviewed! Environmental groups formed the largest interviewee group for a number of reasons. Most of these groups covered a small geographical area or worked on specific issues. Few operated at district or county level and those that did acknowledged large gaps in their knowledge about some parts of their area. A second reason for the large interview size of this group is their diversity: those affiliated to national bodies and those who are independent, those who work on single issues and those who work on a wide range, plus styles of campaigning that are deemed acceptable. The environmental groups were interviewed first as it was felt they were more likely to raise issues that needed to be followed up with builders and local council representatives. Interviewees were selected using a range of methods. The local libraries in Bedfordshire held a database of all voluntary groups in the area. This was found, firstly, to be very out of date and, secondly, to under-represent groups objecting to individual schemes, who were often in strongest disagreement with the local council. The lists of objectors to local plans were also used. However, in the case of Bedford Borough, this was from 1995, so newer groups or who did not respond to the plan were omitted. Because of my involvement in environmental activism in Hertfordshire, this gave me a few initial contacts in the area. From these first interviews more names were suggested. I also contacted the national offices of environmental NGOs for local contacts, including Greenpeace, the CPRE, the Civic

Trust and Friends of the Earth. Local media coverage was helpful in highlighting other groups who were active. Finally, in the first summer of my fieldwork I attended a green faire where about 20 environmental organisations were present. This gave an opportunity to discount groups that were not involved in the planning process.

Most interviewees expressed mild curiosity about the research – why would someone want to interview them? Why would someone choose to study Bedfordshire? Only two environmental group interviewees questioned me closely about how the research would be used. One was a group from an area experiencing strong development pressure, which was concerned that it was not a MORI like survey funded by the local council which was designed to elicit answers from the local community supporting the council's position. The other was an academic with an environmental science background who wanted to know what forms the write up would take. One group strongly resisted being labelled as an environmental or conservation group, insisting they only presented information and let the local council make political decisions. About a third of interviewees had some other local political role or had held one in the past – a councillor, a council officer, a member of a town or parish council, or an active member of a political party. A small minority of interviewees were active in more than one environmental group. One environmental group interviewee was active in the development industry - a local architect.

Interviews with local government

Traditionally there has been an understanding within academic research into local power relations that local politicians and officers form the local political elite (Cochrane, 1998). Representatives from all four local government bodies in Bedfordshire: Mid Bedfordshire Borough Council; South Bedfordshire District Council; Bedford Borough Council and Bedfordshire County Council were interviewed. In total 12 local authority interviews were carried out but, as mentioned earlier, there was overlap between this group and environmental interests. The purpose of interviewing local authorities was to assess the extent to which they were successful in applying pressure to builders. The other was their essential role in mediating conflict between environmental groups and builders through the land use planning system. In each case member and officer views were sought. Government

officials, including those in local government, sometimes try and maintain a fiction that they are not in a powerful position and that decisions are made by their political masters (Cochrane, 1998). These issues of power relations in local government are explored in Chapter Seven. What is important here is that council officers were regarded as actively involved in the decision-making process and were interviewed in addition to elected councillors. There was variation in the seniority of the officers local authorities fielded for interview. One problem that emerged with council interviews undertaken was a relatively high turnover among planning staff. This meant that officers were often not present from when schemes were proposed to when they were completed. Even when efforts were made to seek out the previous holder of a post, it often emerged that they were only in post for a relatively short time.

Another issue was that local authorities were initially reluctant to let me speak to more than one person from each authority. In these cases I explained that because of the nature of the research it was valuable to gain perspectives from both members and officers. When interviewing members it was not intended to give a representative sample of what councillors think about housing or the environment. Councillors were selected who had a specific interest in housing or environmental issues. Councillors who held senior positions were also selected including the chair of planning, leader of the council and leader of a party group. Information on councillors with senior positions was easily obtained from council leaflets. Information about councillors who were interested in the environment or housing issues was obtained from other actors, or from conferences about the environment or housing such as those held by the Government Office and Royal Town Planning Institute. Local press information was helpful here, as a small number of councillors, particularly at the County Council, were frequently quoted on housing issues.

Interviews with builders in Bedfordshire

The reason for interviewing builders is self-evident. They are the central focus of the research. But this proved the most difficult group to access for interview. A data set was obtained from Bedfordshire County Council, which showed developers who had submitted planning applications for one or more houses during the period 1995-1999. There was a considerable amount of noise in this data, with some builders appearing more than once, due to slight misspellings of their name or use of capital letters in

different places. The County Council refused to supply the data for the year 2000, expressing concern about European human rights regulations associated with supplying applicant names. The data from 1995-1999 also contained other companies, such as a child's nursery or local shop, which had land they wanted developing. There were also some private individuals who wished to build an extra dwelling in their back gardens. It is hard to separate these individuals from small builders, who do not have limited company status. Up to date addresses were obtained for the companies involved from the database held at Companies House. Up to date addresses for the smaller companies were found in directories like *Yellow Pages* in local libraries. The Association of Environmental Conscious Builders provided a list of members in Bedfordshire, although it turned out that all of those listed were involved in supplying materials, renovations and conversions rather than new build.

The initial aim was to interview a range of builders: micro builders, who mainly renovate and build one or two houses a year; small builders, who build around 10 houses a year, probably on one site; medium-sized firms, who develop a number of sites each year; and the volume house builders. However, the way Companies House collect and store data presented problems for this approach. Companies were sorted into three categories, those with a turnover of under one million pounds per year, those with a turnover of between one and ten million pounds and a third category with a turnover of over 10 million pounds. There was only one company listed that was in the medium-size bracket at Companies House. It was not possible to alter what was considered 'medium-sized' as the data were pre-sorted. It was not possible to look at the original source, so companies either had a turnover of below one million or above 10 million pounds a year. Small builders often did not appear in the companies house data at all because they did not have limited company status. They were contacted by looking in the business section of the Bedford Yellow Pages. The regional representative for the Housebuilders Federation was approached for Bedfordshire contacts. While most of the volume builders are members of the Housebuilders Federation, membership among small and medium-sized companies is sporadic. Many contacts given by the Housebuilders Federation were still in negotiations over sites in Bedfordshire and had not achieved completions during the study period. When writing to builders to request an interview, the environment was not mentioned at all in the letter. The letter presented the research as looking at how builders make

decisions about the types of houses built, and the estate layout and locations chosen for building. Questions about the environment occur about half way through the interview. This is to determine whether builders respond to questions by mentioning the environment pro-actively without being prompted. Despite vigorous and sustained efforts to interview builders, the number of interviews completed was disappointing, with nine interviews completed. These builders were relatively diverse, including those from the social and market sectors, volume builders, regional companies and small-scale builders. It would have been preferable to have had more builders, but information on building companies could be supplemented by material from other interviewees and other sources.

Choosing subjects for interview and actor-network theory

Actor-network theory is considered when following links from the key actors in rural housing policy to others involved in the housing sector. It was anticipated that the major actors in the policy debate would be housebuilders, environmental pressure groups and local planning authorities. However, it was not possible to discount significant involvement from other sources, such as the Environment Agency; English Nature, the Countryside Agency, the media, financial institutions, and the Government Regional Office. On this account, the strictures of actor-network theory were heeded, especially on the need to follow 'networks', in order to establish which agents influence the positions construction companies and environmental groups take (Murdoch, 1997b). Actor-network theory is based on the idea that as actants struggle with each other, they determine their existence, define their characteristics and attempt to exert themselves upon others through human and non-human intermediaries.

Actor-network theory originated in the field called science and technology studies. Actor-network theory is an evolving theoretical grounding for the social sciences, which seeks a middle ground between the extremes of structuralism and agency-centred approaches, such as ethnomethodology and microsociology. Johathan Murdoch is principally responsible for introducing geographers to actor-network theory, drawing heavily on the work of Latour, Callon and Law. Two of his articles, 'Towards a geography of heterogeneous associations' (1997a), and

'Inhuman/nonhuman/human' (1997b), outline his view of the way in which long-lasting social structures appear out of social interactions, and the method by which power can act at a distance. The main focus of actor-network theory is the interaction between actor-networks, which include nonhuman actors (objects, materials, other creatures etc.). Crucially, within actor-network theory, these nonhuman actors are not merely passive but carry, change, and produce power and value in a symmetrical relationship with individuals and groups of people. Thus, human societies do not exist solely by the interactions of individuals, for there is a crucial role for nonhuman 'actors' in making these interactions last beyond their specific occurrence in time and space (Wood, 2001).

It seems intuitively nonsensical that inanimate objects can influence policy debate. However, Latour (1999) uses the example of the gun-control debate in the USA, arguing that rather than the gun or the person being the actor (or actant) responsible for the act of killing, rather it is a hybrid of the two, the gun-person or person-gun. It is not that the gun is invested with meaning or power by human social relations, or that the technology determines human behaviour, but that the combination of technology and humanity creates qualitatively different and new actants. In activities such as public participation in land use planning decisions, several different actant networks, including human and nonhuman actants, overlap and align with each other. These include aspects of nature and nonhuman intermediaries like texts or money. In actor-network theory, places and the environment are therefore 'shaped' by the representations of actants networks. They are dynamic, constructed representations by actors at particular points in time, building upon the remains of previous rounds of representation and struggle. Here it was anticipated that local planning authorities would be critical, since existing studies abound which highlight their role, but this would not close the analysis from exploring links with other agencies. One unique example of actor-network theory being applied to housing policy is that of Murdoch (2000). He describes the collapse of the planning for housing network as regional and local actants begin to go their own way. The primacy given to meeting household projections gave way to a completing rationality in Murdoch's study. Hence, networks can be challenged as actors propose alternative objectives of government, in this instance using the repertoire of sustainable development in order to assert the

importance of space. Murdoch argues that we are now witnessing the emergence of a new rationality in planning for housing.

In practical terms, for this research actor-network theory led to the identification of a number of interviewees. These included two local Members of Parliament, two members of the local press, two officials from the regional Government Office, a representative from the Environment Agency and two representatives from the Countryside Agency. These interviews were carried out in a similar way to those for the key groups of actors. A letter describing the research and why I wished to interview them was sent, followed by a follow up phone call. Modifications were made to the semi-structured interviews to take account of the unique positions of actors. All these third parties had a potential role in influencing events. For example, the local press can run campaigns in a similar way to environmental pressure groups. The Government Office and Environment Agency have a role in influencing both individual planning decisions and policy documents. They also have a 'campaigning' role in producing reports and holding conferences that may influence the opinions of other actors.

Positionality

Analysis of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee has become a field of academic enquiry in its own right (Burgess, 1984; Rose, 1997). Rose argues that the positionality of the researcher and research are not fixed and easily identifiable. They are constructed and negotiated during different sites of research practice - interviewing, writing, reading. At its most extreme, access to a group of subjects can be restricted because of the gender, race or social class of the interviewer. However, it should not be assumed that once factors such as race or class are admitted, the knowledge produced is somehow more acceptable or objective. As researchers, we cannot always assess our positionality or predict its effects on research. On the one hand, some researchers have argued that there is a need to be more sympathetic to concede the right of those being researched to speak for and to be themselves (Pile, 1991). Yet researchers who are supportive of the aims of those they research are open to potential criticisms of bias. This attitude suggests that it is possible to have a method of research that is unbiased and value-free. Compared with

this perspective, Fantasia (1988) suggests that being biased in research involving inter-group conflict could be a pre-requisite for data gathering. Gaining access to a company, organisation or individual can prove to be one of the most difficult aspects of the case study approach. Access is not a straightforward procedure and different approaches must often be made to individuals at different decision-making levels. Thus, access involves negotiation and renegotiations (Dewberry, 1996). Access influences not only the reliability and validity of the data, but the point of contact within an organisation will influence the collection of data and perspective portrayed, while activities during the access stage will influence the ways those being researched define the research and activities of the researcher (Burgess, 1984). In requesting access to different groups I approached them in different ways.

The environmental groups all knew I was sympathetic to environmental issues and was involved in local environmental activism where I lived in Hertfordshire. I was careful not to say I was involved in any specific group, at least until after the interview, and this was important as it allowed people to be critical or praise that organisation without expecting me to disapprove. My initial interviews with Friends of the Earth groups gave me a way in that made it easier to approach the majority of groups with whom I had no previous contacts. My position as a sympathetic academic and local campaigner inevitably affected the results of the interviews. Subjects assumed I 'knew what it was really like' to be involved in a local group, about problems within groups and between groups, and about what kind of behaviour to expect from developers and local councils. This kind of knowledge has been identified by Rosenberg (1989), who argues that interviewees are more likely to be communicative towards those who show an awareness of their insights and a knowledge of their affairs. This might help explain the high level of willingness to participate shown by the environmental groups, which is probably unusual (Cocking, 1999). Today, there is a growing sense that respondents feel they are being exploited by researchers, who are only concerned with gaining academic recognition and not helping the cause. There can therefore be a reluctance to divert time to helping academics if there do not seem to be benefits for a campaign. For Cocking, there is no easy way to overcome this problem, as it can be difficult for participants to see how the finished work can help their cause if it remains a text that is unread by anyone outside the confines of academia.

My positionality with regard to local authority representatives, builders and others was more ambiguous. Several of local authority officers appeared nervous because of my status as an academic, although more senior officials were more confident about the process. Local government officials could not simply be grouped together as a local elite in a powerful position relative to the researcher, as described by Sabot (1999) and Cochrane (1998) in their work on the issues involved in researching elites. Some interviewees in local government viewed the research project as being able to generate some useful findings for them or simply as an opportunity to present their organisation in a favourable light: The builders, as the most difficult group to access, were in a different relationship. They could cut short the process at any point and as a result were in a position of power to shape the agenda. There were a significant number of builders within the study area who did not see a benefit to themselves or their company in giving time to the research project. Among those who did take part, the builders were the most blunt group about their reasons for participating. One interviewee at a regional medium-sized company was unhappy about the image of his profession as "people with their bums hanging out their trousers" and wanted to present a more professional image of the industry. In another instance, two women from another regional company seemed keen to stress that the building industry was one in which women could succeed. In a third, instance at a small local company, working mainly for housing associations, the interviewee said that his daughter was carrying out a research project on social housing for her degree and he thought helping students was the right thing to do. These varying motivations for involvement in research mean that the builders cannot be described as statistically random. However, they have not been pre-selected because they have a particular interest in or concern about the environment.

Using quantitative data from the land use planning system

Since the inception of the development control system in 1947 an extraordinary amount of information has been generated. In 2002/2003 in England alone 634,000 planning applications were submitted in a single year (ODPM, 2003). This is the highest figure for 13 years and in the earlier years of the operation of the planning system figures would have been considerably lower. Although the quality, quantity

and organisation of these records varies over time and between local planning authorities the potential value of this data source is enormous. The complete geographical cover provided by the data means comparisons can be made within and between towns and villages. It is also possible to analyse proposed changes that were never implemented, as applications that were refused are also kept on file. The planning data held on file is taxonomic, so it is possible to extract information on particular development types with ease. In the case of this research only information about planning applications for one house or more were of interest. Because the planning system in the UK is discretionary, and decisions have to refer to a wide range of policies, developments are discussed in a bargaining process. The records offer insight into this process and the local authority decision-making. Even those whose work has focused on cultural geography have begun to recognise the benefits of using planning data. Thus, Healey argues that there will be a dominant discourse within a plan arising from the process of plan creation (Healey 1993). This dominant discourse will reflect the discourse of the most powerful groups within the plan making process. Porteous (1995) adds the coda that planning sources of data should not be looked on merely as objective indicators divorced from economic and political processes. He argues that it is better to look at them as vital evidence of an ongoing contest for space. Most local authorities keep a planning register, which records basic data about an application. It is this information this research utilises. Certainly, the planning data proved useful in assessing competing claims from interviewees about development pressure across the county.

Analysing in-depth study evidence

How does the researcher interpret contradictions between different sources of data? Similarly, how are contradictions between accounts given by different actors resolved? Given that environmental policy is operationalised through communication, the way in which people express their views on the process, other actors and their own role is significant. Even if factual evidence is contradicted by other interviewees, it provides interesting evidence on how actors see themselves in the policy process. In this regard, Yin (1989) specifies two types of analytical strategy. Firstly, there are those that rely on theoretical propositions (deduction). This is the preferred strategy where the original objectives and design of the case study were based on theoretical

positions from the literature. This theoretical perspective helps sift relevant data and helps to organise the case study and define alternative explanations to be examined. The second strategy is developing a case description (induction). The strategy here is to develop a descriptive framework for organising the case study. The descriptive approach in Yin's opinion is less preferable than a theoretical strategy but is considered to be a good alternative where theoretical propositions are absent. While this research primarily adopts a deductive approach, examining the theoretical framework of ecological modernisation, it remains open to new ideas and concepts emerging from the empirical data. The descriptive approach may help identify appropriate causal links to be analysed. In a complex and involved study a descriptive insight may well identify the process of decision-making and lend greater 'explanatory' elements to the overall case study. The approach taken in this study is informed by the views presented in Glaser and Strauss (1967 pX), an approach called theoretical sampling or grounded theory. They define this as

> ... the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. There are two important concepts associated with theoretical sampling that should be considered. Saturation refers to the fact that no additional data can be found that contribute to the categories being considered. The researcher must focus on 'situations' until no further insights can be generated. Secondly slices of data defines different kinds of data that give the analyst different views or vantage points from which to understand a category and develop its properties.

In Glaser and Strauss's approach the generation of data and the generation of theory are inextricably linked by them informing each other. At the start of the research ideas were already formed about what issues would prove important. This did not prevent issues and themes not previously considered from emerging from the empirical data in the way Glazer and Strauss describe. When most contemporary researchers draw on the work of Glaser and Strauss they do not do so in a pure form but use a combination of an inductive and a deductive approach. The subsequent chapters now examine each of the key groups of actors. The environmental groups, local government and the house builders.

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Chapter Six

Environmental pressure groups

Environmental pressure groups are one of the three core groups of actors who are thought to influence how environmental concerns are incorporated into new housing developments. They are also important in providing a perspective about environmental claims made by local government actors and house builders. This chapter will address some of the theoretical issues concerning environmental pressure groups and how they relate to the other actors. The environmental movement can be defined as broad networks of people and organisations engaged in collective action in the pursuit of environmental benefits (Rootes, 1999). Rydin and Greig (1995) makes the distinction between those who hold one or more attitudes associated with environmentalism, who may undertake activities such as recycling waste and buying organic produce, and those who engage in the policy process. In the general public concern for ecological care, support for the environment movement exceeds 60% of the population. However, concerns are not necessarily synonymous with endorsement for the movement's strategies and solutions. In western Europe such endorsement varies between 20% who give declared support to less than 1% who have actual participation (Pakulski, 1993). Environmentalists who are engaged in the policy process must in some sense speak up for the environment in public meetings, educational institutions, local council meetings, or items in the media.

When examining methodological issues in chapter five the shift away from the national state as a primary focus for research was examined. In researching local environmental groups and their involvement in implementation of housing policy, the role of government and business in decision-making is complemented by the study of civic and environmental groups. Wapner (1996) contends that the study of organised environmental groups such as Greenpeace, FoE and WWF marks a movement away from a traditional understanding of politics as essentially statist to one that recognises the importance of the politics of civil society. Wapner (1996) considers the political complexities of the work of the World Wildlife Fund, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace and contrasts this network with that of civil society, which he argues is an

increasingly important political and cultural realm. Although he is particularly interested in 'world civic politics' he contends that much political activity occurs at the local level which impacts on perceptions and actions at the global level. Practical examples of how local issues in Bedfordshire are driving the national agendas include bypasses for Friends of the Earth, housing for CPRE and radioactive dumping for Greenpeace, which are examined in this chapter. For Wapner (1996) creating state interest, and hopefully changing state policy, comes through the civic realm of political activism, including media activism, which is common among environmental pressure groups.

The environment movement

Fuentes and Frank (1994), states that only the environment movement and peace movement can truly be classed as new among the new social movements, because the others, including the feminist movement have existed for centuries in many parts of the world. Fuentes argues that generalised environmental degradation that threatens livelihoods and welfare is the product of recent industrial development and has produced the environment movement as a defensive movement. Another portrayal of the environment movement as a defensive movement comes from Hall and associates (1996) who discuss the diverse oppositional cultural politics of place that have been found in localities threatened by redevelopment or regeneration. Such defensive strategies often develop in opposition to what has been perceived as being the appropriation of one people's history by another. One manifestation of this in Hall's work is the conscious manipulation of city imagery. This is not only an attempt to make the city more attractive to investors but plays a role in social control logic, convincing local people as to the benefits of entrepreneurial strategies. Similarly, Plotkin (1991) examines the rise of what he calls enclave movements in the USA. The enclave involves a defence of neighbourhood, local space and identity where these values are threatened by economic, political and cultural incursions. Although accepting the natural tendency of residents to rally round a vanishing piece of communal space Plotkin describes the problems of the enclave groups as being largely defensive, avoiding the public sphere, and a fear of taking on any power structure. The enclave can readily become a mini fortress that tends towards a rigid and undifferentiated exclusionism.

An unwillingness to accept locally unwanted land uses has led to resident communities being regarded as parochial, irrational and selfish (Mazmanian & Morell, 1990). The view that community members are acting selfishly suggests that individuals are more concerned about individual interests such as the value of their property or about their health than about collective concerns. The conceptualisation of 'Not In My Back Yard' or NIMBY behaviour as an expression of self-interest follows from the broader intellectual tradition that regards the individual as the basic unit of analysis and assumes that behavioural motivation stems from selfishness. The rational choice model of collective action (Olsen, 1965) states that individuals will only take part in groups if there is sufficient incentive. In his view collective action will not secure membership as potential members will free ride. The provision of selective material benefits as a central factor in membership decisions is commonly held for union organisations who provide services such as insurance and legal advice. Selected benefits tied to a collective appeal are also offered by some environmental groups. For example Sierra Club members can easily recover their $25.00 membership with discounts on travel, hikes and social events. Although a part of environmental group membership may be ascribed to by-product benefits, Jordan and Maloney (1996) doubt its importance and argue that incentives such as magazines and holiday discounts are secondary rather than primary consideration for those joining environmental groups. McFarland (1976) in a study of public interest lobbies concludes that the data shows that selective material benefits are quite infrequent and seem inadequate to explain the volume of political activity. An obvious place is other less tangible benefits of a social or civic sort. Civic commitment on the part of ordinary citizens seems sincere, not a rhetorical cloak to cover some more calculated and self interested motive. Similarly, Jordan and Maloney's (1996) study of Friends of the Earth and Amnesty International notes the predominance of well educated members and members with a high disposable income, which suggests that membership is seen as a donation rather than an investment. While it is clear that many people who oppose the development of locally unwanted land uses act in their own interests these are not the only factors that influence their actions. McFarland (1976) refers to the 'civic-balance' beliefs in his work of well-educated citizens who may participate in organisations to balance the power of special interests. Individuals who take part in resistance tend to believe that they serve as a voice for their community and that they act in the collective interest (Steelman, 1998). Those groups

that rely on benefits to generate membership such as the National Trust, which has two million members who are allowed access to National Trust properties, raise question marks over their status as environmental pressure groups.

Did the groups in the study area provide material benefits to their members? In most cases this was limited to a newsletter, keeping them in touch with local news and events and the opportunity to take part in modest social activities such as guided walks, meals or in one instance a visit to an environment centre in Wales. Unlike trade union membership it was not possible to account for the environmental activism in terms of direct material benefits. However, in the study area this idea of the environment movement as a defensive movement has some credence. For example, four of the 24 groups had been established with the sole aim of stopping a particular development. This does not explain why two of the groups are still active, in one case 30 years after the original threat passed, in the other case seven years after the initial threat. It also fails to account for interest shown by the groups in a range of wider issues including regional policy documents, pro-active environmental management such as tree planting, and campaigning on issues such as genetically modified food, or taking part in Millennium celebrations. The environment movement as a defensive movement does not provide a complete or satisfactory explanation for activity in Bedfordshire. This idea of the environment movement as a defensive movement is not uncontested in the research literature. For example:

> ... the phenomenon of clearly universalistic concerns articulated by the mostly new (e.g. green) movements. These concerns can not be linked with any sectional interest or specific status group claims. It is also hard to see all the green movements as simply assertions or defences of any specific lifestyles, although some elements of lifestyle politics is undoubtedly present in green mobilisations. (Pakulski, 1993, p147)

The idea of the environmental movement as a lifestyle choice by its members is one of a number of ways the movement is dismissed by its critics. Environmental protest movements have been categorised and dismissed as, variously, the protest of youthful rebellion, of middle-class nimbyism, of disaffection in the white underclass or the politics of misguided idealism (Maples, 1998). Most class accounts of western eco-movements link them with either the new middle classes or an altogether new class (Pakulski, 1993). High levels of economic security and high levels of education made the new middle class receptive to the expressive style and universalistic concerns of

the green movement. Given their strategic occupational positions they see more clearly the contradictions in the capitalist state administrative systems, and are therefore in the forefront of such protest movements. They also have knowledge and skills that increase the effectiveness of their political actions, and enjoy considerable freedom and autonomy from conformist pressures. This explanation of class de-links the notion of class from structurally derived economic interest. Is this really a class action or a reaction by certain social categories? In response to the problems of trying to link the middle class to the environment movement the explanatory concept of the new class developed. Attempts to explain social movements' involvement in terms of new class come from several quarters including a technocratic stream which diagnoses the rise of a new managerial class and a knowledge class which points to the rise of new critical and social forces (Pakulski, 1993). Touraine (1985) links these new classes to changes from the old form of industrial society gradually being replaced by a fundamentally different pattern of class relations and class conflicts. Many of these concepts of new class are not only vague but appear not to match results of empirical research.

Dalton (1988) and Kriesi (1989) point to occupational heterogeneity of movement supporters. These stress the importance of generation, education and urban location as the new basis of political cleavages and concerns. For Turner (1988), to understand contemporary social movements we need a theory of status and status politics, because the conventional Marxist emphasis on economic power and economic class is inadequate. Such movements as the green movement and the peace movement represent the struggle of 'status columns' and 'status groups' for political recognition of their distinctiveness, needs and interests using the idiom of citizenship and political rights. The concept of status politics formed a starting point for postmodern interpretations of new movements and new politics. According to such post modern interpretations the rise of new social movements is a symptom of the post modern process of 'hyper-differentiation', class decomposition and class/ partisan dealignment in questioning the link between socio-economic classes and contemporary political cleavages.

The majority of interviewees were reluctant to address the issues of bias within their own group or other environmental groups in Bedfordshire. They were prompted on

issues such as occupational bias, for example if the farming lobby had a strong influence, about gender biases and about age or class biases. A number of groups expressed concern about their age structure either being too middle aged and not attracting enough young people or even all their members being over retirement age in the case of one civic society. However, some groups saw positive benefits in having a number of members who were retired and able to go to the council offices during office hours. This point is illustrated by an interviewee from Friends of the Earth:

> Well I suppose it's the people who have got more time isn't it. And yes... it's the people whose children are grown up or on the way to being grown up. People who have a bit of time, who are either retired or semi-retired. Who end up doing all the paper work that's, that's just other people haven't the time to do it. If you have young children you can't go out in the evenings so much and... Mostly, mostly with things like residents groups it's just the locality, it could be everybody in the road. For a few months and then they just stop talking to each other again.

This second point that residents' groups set up to oppose a specific scheme were much more broad based was prominent among the environmental group interviewees. Despite over a third of the interviewees expressing concern about their age profile none of the groups appeared to be looking at either a recruitment strategy for younger members, or examining what aspects of their organisation may put off younger members from being involved. Of the interviewees own profiles 16 of the 25 interviewees were in full-time work while the others were either retired or semi-retired. Of the 16 who worked, five worked from home, partly from home or for their own company. Ten worked in some way in the environmental field, making it easier for them to keep up to date with issues they used in local campaigning. Four were paid to work full-time on their environmental campaigns in Bedfordshire. There was some self-awareness, particularly within the more established groups, that the local environment movement did not contain active members from the diverse range of economic and cultural backgrounds present in Bedfordshire residents. One interviewee from CPRE did make the point that the group was in no way representative but felt this did not invalidate the comments they made

> Yes, not so much in this county and I think that's probably because our branch is a lot younger and has, although I would say a lower average age it doesn't mean to say that we have got a lot of young people involved because I don't think they have got any but some of CPRE's other branches having been going for much longer, do have that sort of influence, either farming or land

owning influence much higher proportion, higher proportion of older people, and very often, not very often, in some cases a much higher proportion of better off people, higher socio economic groups and so on. I think that's not the case in, I wont say we have got a cross-section, I know we haven't, yes we are probably equal in terms of men and women if that's significant, I don't think that is. We haven't got any ethnic minority involvement for example, so we don't represent a cross-section of population and we don't claim to do, but we don't have that sort of farming and land owing influence that some of our sister branches do, I put that down to the relatively young age of the branch.

An interviewee from the organisation Earth First! was more blunt about the relationship between class and environmental activism

> Definitely within the villages it's the *noueveux riche* and the new middle class and certainly the old sorts who have been there for a long time. Basically they don't want anybody invading their space. I think they don't want to be crowded in, they have got a bit more appreciation of what little they have got around them, you know... And a lot of the like the residents groups is just pure NIMBYism, it's that simple. Go away, I don't want to look at it.

An interviewee from one of the village societies primarily involved in trying to stop a specific development pointed to other, pragmatic reasons, why the middle class may dominate environmental groups:

> I think that it is getting harder and harder to get people involved because people are so busy. And to a degree fighting a planning application, it takes a lot of time and effort and to a degree money. It's my personal money, a lot of it that goes in, my telephone calls and stamps and things like that. Its my time, my petrol. You've got to be committed to doing it. And you've got to think at the end was it worthwhile. Even if you loose was it worth the time and effort. ... It depends where you live. I mean [name of village] is a reasonably well off middle class village, so the people you are going to get out are going to be articulate people who can write a good letter to their MP. People who live in [name of village] know how to work the system. They know you can write to the county council, or the district council, you can lobby your councillors, you can write to your MP. That wouldn't necessarily happen, say, in Luton.

This highlights the fact that personal financial resources are required by all those campaigners who are not paid members of staff or where national funds are allocated to local areas in the case of Greenpeace or CPRE. They also highlight the fact that the social composition of the group will to some extent reflect the social composition of the area they are based in. As the majority of the rural areas are dominated by the middle class it is inevitable that groups based in rural areas reflect this. However, within the much more ethnically and socially diverse towns, particularly Bedford, the

civic and amenity groups did not seem to reflect this diversity. What important point should we draw about this examination of class and defensive politics in the environmental movement? A number of factors seemed to influence people's ability to become local environmental campaigners including income, free time particularly during office hours, and an ability to access environmental information to assist in campaigning. However, these factors on their own do not make someone begin or remain in environmental campaigning. The presence of an environmental threat seemed significant in a minority of instances as the sole reason for group formation and continuation, but so did the possibility for environmental opportunities especially habitat improvement. While important lessons can be drawn from material directed at the national environment movement that examines class and involvement local environmental activity differs in significant ways from the national pattern. It is to these local environmental conflicts that we now turn.

Lessons from other conflicts between development and environmental interests

Of considerable relevance to this research are studies of other conflicts between environmental and corporate interests at the local or regional level. It is hoped these will provide some insight into the particular case of new rural housing. New rural housing, like other new developments such as power stations, mineral extraction sites, waste treatment facilities and new roads are often seen as locally unwanted land uses. As such, proposals to construct these near existing residential developments is likely to elicit a negative response. The environmental field that has attracted most academic interest has been the anti-roads movement (Doherty, 1999; North 1998; Burningham, 1998; Wall, 1999). Doherty's research focuses on the rise of the anti- roads movement as a radical movement, using a repertoire of direct action. He addresses why existing environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth could not accommodate the concerns and demands of the anti-roads movement. Contrary to expectation by new social movement theorists the anti- roads movement changed the political agenda by bringing prominence to a previously low profile issue, in a strong state and without any major institutional allies. The case of the roads protestors in Doherty's research was reinforced by splits within government – Conservative MPs opposing the M25 widening, the Department of Health's concerns about air pollution, and the Department of the Environment saying in the 1994 Sustainable Development

Strategy (HMSO 1994a) that traffic growth was harmful to the environment. Their case was also reinforced by high profile reports from the Standing Advisory Committee on Trunk Road Assessment (HMSO 1994 b) and the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP 1994). While there has been criticism from Labour MPs about the government housing policy the size of the majority allows these criticisms to be ignored. There has been no split between the different government departments over housing policy or high profile government commissioned reports calling for policy to be changed. A cut in the roads programme also represents a major financial saving for the government, something a cut in housing allocations does not achieve.

Burningham (1998) examines the social construction of environmental problems, taking the case study of a road improvement near Chichester, Sussex. While a number of environmental problems were raised at public enquiries into the scheme including air pollution, visual intrusion and noise, it was the noise issue that continued to generate public concern after the scheme was completed. There was a fundamental disagreement between the Department of Transport and local residents about the severity of the problem. Local people framed their experiences of noise problems according to changes the noise had made in their daily lives such as keeping windows closed in hot weather. The DoT employed the 'complex science' of noise modelling, which they felt was better than on site direct measurements. The majority of those taking part in campaigning groups about the road noise were retired professionals with the money, time and expertise necessary for the emergence and maintenance of systematic protest. It is inevitable according to Burningham (1998) that the circumstances of participants will equip them with varying skills for organising an effective protest, useful contacts and financial resources, and will influence the strategies they use to make their claims and the way in which they construct the problem. The road noise campaign focused on gaining the support of local MPs and carrying out research into road noise by reading manuals and carrying out direct experiments. Burningham also highlights the lack of trust by residents in the public enquiry process. Interviewees from residents groups stated in interview they had the odds stacked against them from the start and described the process as a farce. They were particularly hostile to the efforts of government agencies to compensate them for the loss of property value rather than fix the problem.

Steelman and Carmin (1998) in a study of local resistance to a new limestone quarry highlights similar issues to the new road in Burningham's study. There was a lack of trust on the part of local residence towards to mining company which was based partly on previous experience with mining operations, party on errors in the technical documentation that were obvious to local residents and partly on a reluctance on the part of the company to offer written guarantees to residents over issues that concerned them such as drinking water quality. Like Burningham's residents there was hostility to the idea of compensation for environmental damage. Steelman and Carmin describes a common property regime that operated between residents who already use the natural resources in the area to be affected by the quarry. Residents in the area compiled with unwritten rules and norms that govern natural resource use, the most important of which was the supply of fresh water. This informal regime became formalised in the face of threat from quarrying. This more structured form of collective action allowed for the formation of local management committees, use of legal action and applications for grants. When members of a stable common property regime voice concerns, these will focus on collective concerns and community interests rather than personal security and individual gain. A common theme in the residents testimonies to the formal hearing assessing the scheme were the ideas of equity and stewardship. Many residents stressed the importance of intergeneration equity, that they wanted the area to be in a good condition for their children. They also felt that the only one to profit from the scheme was the quarry company and not the wider community. The idea of local people as stewards who cared about the natural environment and water resources and the quarry company who's aim is to make a fast profit was stressed. The community also expressed a strong desire to have local control over change to ensure any development would be mutually beneficial.

North's research (1998) examines the unlikely alliance between middle class residents and often unemployed or student protestors. North (1998) describes these as Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) local residents and Not On Planet Earth (NOPE) eco-warriors. North's paper focuses on a specific environmental protest against the development of a bypass on the slopes of Solsbury Hill near Bath. North points to the differences that emerge between eco-warriors who campaign against the car- culture, objecting to all road-building on ecological grounds and the local campaign group

Save Our Solsbury. The local campaign group supported the idea of a single carriageway road to relive traffic problems in the village of Batherston and stressed the importance of the Solsbury hill for tourism and recreation. Theoretically North explains these differences as a Resource Mobilisation approach taken by the Save Our Solsbury group, proposing practical shifts in the allocation of resources to better manage traffic problems to the New Social Movement approach taken by the eco-warriors seeking broader social change. These differences can be seen to some extent in Bedfordshire as the countryside management groups such as The Greensands Trust and Ivel Valley Countryside project promote the countryside for tourism and recreation while calling for better management of environmental problems, while other groups including radical environmental groups such as Earth First! and some local civic groups base their arguments in moral rather than resources management terms. It is to these differences between an reformist and a radical approach to environmental management that the chapter now turns.

Forms of Environmentalism

In the literature on the varieties of green and environmental thought a common distinction exists between 'reformist' and 'radical' approaches to the defence of the natural world. There is no consensus on the use of these terms in the literature, so while some writers use the term 'environmentalism' to describe a managerial reformists approach to the conservation of nature, others use the same term to refer to radical ecology or 'green' politics that rejects reformism, arguing for major transformation in the western way of life Sutton (1998). This dichotomy originates in the work of Arne Naess (1973) when he made a distinction between deep and shallow ecology as philosophical approaches to society/ nature relations. Blowers (1997) makes a distinction between environmentalism which has an established interest with issues of conservation and remedial action and Ecologism. Ecologolism emphasises decentralisation, changing of life styles and greater social equity. This second form coincides with disenchantment with modernism, concern for broader global issues and more radical means of dealing with them. In the Blowers (1997) typology, environmentalists are seen as being consistent with the process of ecological modernisation. Other writers have used different distinctions. In Dobson's work (1990) 'green' is used for reformists and 'Green' for radical. Eckersley (1992)

defines 'ecologism' as radical in contrast to 'conservationism' which is reformist and Porritt (1984) makes a distinction between 'light' reformists and 'dark' radical greens. These viewpoints are ideal types and as such are mutually incompatible. In practice there is a continuum of possibilities between the extremes.

Environmentalism can be defined as approaches to society/nature relations that emphasise the benefits to human beings of natural objects and attempt to rectify problems of environmental damage and pollution through technological means. This support for the 'experts' finds strongly argued support in the work of Kai Lee (1993). Lee's ideal approach to the environment would be ecosystem management in which professional resources managers trained in ecology take charge of whole ecosystems. The role of political conflict in Lee's model is to raise issues that environmental managers may otherwise miss. Groups such as RSPB, the Woodland Trust and the National Trust as well as many other smaller conservation, preservation and amenity organisations argue for and are involved in managing nature reserves and public access areas. Effectively they are professional or semi-professional environmental managers described by Lee. Those adopting a radical ecologist perspective would argue that while this approach can save some wildlife in the short term by establishing green 'islands' it does nothing to prevent the large scale destruction of nature by industrial interests across the planet (Adams, 1996, p115). It can further be argued that attempts to manage naturally occurring ecosystems in their own interests is an example of the modern hubris that is the root cause of environmental problems (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p56). Within the interviews with environmental groups both radical and reformist views were expressed. However interviewees could not neatly be pigeonholed into one category or the other as the literature implies. Clearly, a continuum of views exist and some were even expressed during the same interview. There appeared general support for the traditional reformist approach of buying and managing land in an ecologically sound way as illustrated in this interview from Friends of the Earth:

> The piece of woodland that came up recently, we tried to get the Woodland Trust interested in it but they wanted too high a price for the Woodland Trust because they wanted it for development land. It did have trees planted on it so I think that put off prospective developers

There was however resistance towards the countyside management projects willingness to trade off one environmental issue against another showing a split between radical and reformist parts of the movement:

> They have done a lot of good work but when we put them on the spot to be really radical, to oppose things. No they were apparently involved weeks earlier with this so called recycling site, the car recycling site on the other side of the A1. They seemed to think it was cool, it was OK to do that, because they were making a quote 'net wildlife gain' because these people were apparently planting a few more trees or something. At which point I lost my rag

Even from groups who, at a national level, are adopting a managerial rhetoric of ecological modernisation, there was still considerable hostility towards new development. A Friends of the Earth interviewee is particularly scathing about house building in rural areas in Bedfordshire.

> They [house builders] are sort of like Vultures. They have not been successful yet but I'm always aware they are there. They put applications in and they get turned down and this goes on and on.

Differences between environmental groups, therefore, are not only about tactics, issues for campaigns and location but also about values. The values of the majority of the groups centred on preservation rather than a managerial accommodation of development interests. An investigation into local environmental values is a study in its own right. It is, however, significant for the research because, when developers offer mitigation for environmental damage or offer to incorporate higher environmental standards in certain aspects of their work this approach will not satisfy those environmental pressure groups who approach this issue in a moral rather than a managerial way.

The Development of NGOs

The environment movement quickly became formalised into many Environmental Pressure groups or Non Governmental Organisations NGOs. Grant (1989, p9) provides a useful definition of a pressure group as:

> ... an organisation which seeks as one of its functions to influence the formation and implementation of public policy, public policy representing a

> set of authoritative decisions taken by the executive, the legislature, and by local government and the European Community.

Some of these environmental pressure groups represent the transformation of earlier groups who campaigned for animal welfare or were leisure groups for natural historians repositioning themselves: Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Botanical Society of the British Isles, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. In other cases bodies such as the county Naturalist Trusts set up campaigning branches that were to become the Wildlife Trusts. Others such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace were started as new organisations during the 1960s and early 1970s. Lowe and Goyder (1983) and Evans (1992) emphasise the great diversity present in environmental NGOs: they vary in terms of focus; operation; and membership. Holloway (1998, p1198) in a more recent examination of radical environmental protest in Britain also highlights the diversity in environmental activism.

> There are many shades of green to the environment movement in the United Kingdom today. If one were to gather the parameters of inclusion far enough it would be possible to gather everything from the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) to Earth First!, under the general rubric of environmentalism.

Is there a distinct character to the rural environment movement? The Rural Development Commission, which has since been subsumed into the Countryside Agency, attempted to promote rural community activism through the Rural Development Area programmes. These schemes built on the rural community social worker programmes of the 1970s but the scale of the geographical areas covered meant the initiative failed to make a substantive contribution to rural community development. Self-help programmes for rural communities include a number of umbrella bodies: ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England) means each county in England had a Rural Community Council. The Rural Community Council's work included field officers who carries out community development work in villages. Rogers (1987) presents these self-help groups as being responsive to people's needs and effective in implementation. Similarly Derounian (1998) has argued that are important for rural communities in providing specialist help in key areas such as charitable recognition, community run shops and environmental action. In contrast Bradley (2000) argues that the self help approach promoted by the Conservative government in the 1990s and implemented by the rural community

councils shows evidence of elitism, wishing to involve those who are already involved such as those in the WI, village hall committee or WRVS. Bradley also raises the issue of funding and explains that rural community councils have been subject to tight an unpredictable financial constraints. Their effectiveness will therefore vary considerably depending on the size and quality of their permanent staff. In another recent account of rural organisations and institutions is given by Mayerfield-Bell (1995). It is in village organisations and institutions that much of the village life is played out. Organisations act as forums for outworking of village identities. They are spaces in which village politics are played out and acted. Mayerfield-Bell argues that belonging to such institutions is important in ascribing an individual a rural identity. He suggests that belonging illustrates the importance of community to a person arguing that (p104):

> Most Childerleyans feel that a real country person will have a ready desire to do things that express a tie to that community. Hence country folk will become involved in a multiplicity of organisations and institutions and these will become essential within and to the very fabric of rural social life.

This view of feeling the need to become involved to be a proper resident were reflected in the interviews with village societies in Bedfordshire. Below, one of the village groups with a strong wildlife focus is describing various projects including a self guided walks leaflet and a panel on the village green to make sure people are better informed about local conservation issues.

> They [village residents] are environmentally friendly but they are embarrassed by the fact they don't really know. I'm the first one to admit I don't really know and I've lived in the country all my life. So this [points to sign] is going out on the public right of way just there.

However, the rural environment movement is contradictory. In addition to the paternalistic movement described by Lowe and Buller and the significance of involvement to local identity, Holloway (1998, p1205) argues that the rural is also central to the radical environment movement.

> The rural has become almost solely the space for radical environmental confrontation and contest. The spaces and places, whether they comprise copses, muddy fields, quarries, hills or valleys, are where direct action, and the embodiment of radical environmental politics, is enacted in Britain.

Holloway draws out a number of common themes from the publications and other alternative media sources produced by the radical environment movement. Rurality

and the rural are nature's refuge or storehouse. The rural space becomes a collection of everything that is natural. Another important theme revolves around the rural as a common heritage and past. The representation of the rural idyll is not unique to the radical environment movement and can be identified in organisations such as the National Trust and CPRE. The alternative version of rurality and national identity that stresses common land rights, pre-Christian history and mythical sites in the rural landscape is unique to the radical movement. The more radical group in the Bedfordshire, particularly the Earth First! interviewee, enjoyed seeing the environment take 'revenge' for inappropriate development. This compared with the more conservative groups responses who limited themselves to feelings of 'I told you so.' Below the Earth First! interviewee described the development of housing on a site of wildlife importance.

> It was a good site, everybody walked across it and walked their doggies on it and lots of creatures bobbing around in this tiny stream which is now enclosed in this large cement pipe. We have had the last laugh because this site is on solid clay. Floods to 10 inches in the winter and cracks open to a depth of about 10 inches in the summer.

Why is there such diversity within the environmental movement? In part it relates to the point made earlier about different sets of values. It also relates to disagreement over tactics. The large number of national groups is often a result of splits in what was previously a single organisation, for example David Brower's split from the Sierra Club in the USA to found Friends of the Earth, and the split between Greenpeace members to form the Environmental Investigation Agency. Balser (1997) addresses the causes and consequences of what she describes as factionalism in the environment movement and other new social movements. Factionalism refers to the conflict that develops between groups, belonging to the same organisation, who formerly held common beliefs but who experience a growing divergence in their views and interests. Schism occurs when a group formerly breaks its membership ties to the organisation. She asserts that factionalism has traditionally been approached from a closed system perspective, it is viewed as an internal response to an internal problem. Factionalism is considered a result of poor internal conflict management and a source of organisational decline. However, internal conflict may result in the co-existence of multiple strategies, thus expanding the targets of protest activity. Factionalism often expands the range of tactics used, which itself elicits a response from the external environment. Changes in tactics may, for example, alter the reactions from the public,

resulting in changed levels of sympathies from these important audiences. Balser argues that both the internal and external environment are important in explaining the causes of factionalism. Social control mechanisms carried out by the state are an important factor in the schisms that occurred in many of the movements she studied. These mechanisms included: infiltration as the CIA did with Earth First!; repression activities such as planting false stories in the media, harassing members, and sabotaging protest activities; and institutional channelling by funding and supporting certain moderate sections of the movement. The pattern that emerged in Bedfordshire to some extent reflected the national pattern of environmental NGOs and the splits that had occurred here. There were also cases of new groups forming at the local level to fill roles that were being vacated by local government, particularly the countryside management groups. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven. There were also local cases of groups making splits from existing organisations. Many of the village and wildlife groups formed because of a dissatisfaction with the campaigning and environmental enhancement activities being carried out by the parish council. A significant number of the village pressure groups began as wildlife or development sub groups of the parish council.

The most important division between the groups in Bedfordshire is those that rely on voluntary effort and those who employ paid staff. These behave in quite different ways. Why is there a split between groups who seek to bring about change through their mass voluntary membership and those who rely on the political lobbying of paid staff? Diani and Donati (1999) states that most political organisations including environmental pressure groups are shaped by their response to two basic functional requirements, resource mobilisation and political efficacy. On the one hand they must secure through variable combinations of money and volunteer time the resources essential to the organisation's survival and expansion. On the other hand in order to perform effectively in the political process, political organisations may select varying combinations of tactics disrupting or threatening to disrupt routine political procedures. Full compliance with the rules of the game in political negotiation may grant official recognition but depotentiate their challenge. Confrontation may increase their bargaining power on some occasions, but lead ultimately to their institutional marginalisation. Rootes (1995) in his article *Britain: greens in a cold climate* he argues that unlike much of mainland Europe greens enjoyed relatively privileged

access to decision makers and are constrained against action which might compromise that. This pattern emerged in the groups with paid staff, and to a lesser extent those linked to national offices who displayed caution about the group's reputation.

Norton (1991) in his book *Towards Unity among Environmentalists* assesses the political cleavages that bisect the environment movement, although much of the empirical work was undertaken in the USA. While much of the work focuses on the differences between the Conservationist and Preservationist parts of the movement Norton also sees differences in tactics as one of the most important emerging features.

> When environmentalists differ regarding policies and strategies today, they are usually disagreeing regarding the appropriateness of a given strategy to a particular situation, as, for example which areas and how much National Forest land should be devoted to protection as opposed to production. These disagreements are often based on very different assessments of the magnitude of different spill over effects of exploitation – such as stream degradation and loss of diversity – on their larger context and on the values humans derive from that context. Needless to say, self interest plays a role in advocacy of land use decisions, as evidenced by the NIMBY syndrome, in which local groups gain their power from quality of life arguments, but arguments that emphasise quality of life in very small contexts, such as a suburban municipality.....(1991 p192)

There is even then disagreement about what environmentalists disagree about. Norton reducing the disagreement mainly a matter of approach. Holloway (1998) and Pepper (1996), see the differences as not only about differences in approach but also fundamental differences in values discussed earlier. Some of these differences described in Norton's work, can be explained in terms of a split between the grass roots and the centre and it is to this that we now turn.

The relationship between local and national NGOS

The relationship between local community groups and national NGOs, both part of the same social movement, is critical. The national NGOs need local groups to deliver some of their work programmes, for example to collect signature on petitions, carry out media stunts, provide case studies for media work and research reports. They are also needed to provide political legitimacy, but this need has been to some extent negated by the use of membership figures or 'supporter' figures as a measure of legitimacy. The local groups need the national NGOs for support services such as

publications and reports, other materials to assist in the campaign, speakers at public events, access to the national media and occasionally access to national politicians. This local-national relationship must be considered against the background of increased instutionalization of the environment movement in Britain. In Britain the institutionalisation of the environment movement has proceeded rapidly since the mid 1980s. Debate about environmental issues is now largely conducted via scientific evidence and counter-evidence in a culture of expertise. Environmental groups have necessarily been drawn into this culture. They increasingly use scientists to provide evidence for their cause. This can be seen at a national and regional level in the debate over housing numbers. The Council for the Protection of Rural England and the House Builders Federation delve into increasingly complex demographic statistics to justify higher or lower targets for the national household projections and regional figures such as the SERPLAN figures for the South East. This trend can even be seen occasionally at the local level as environmental groups commission their own surveys of ecology, hydrology or traffic impacts (Murdoch and Marsden, 1994). This trend has been highlighted by academics as a cause for concern. This professionalisation divides it from the popular support it earlier enjoyed. Wall (1999) even argues that environmental pressure groups have little time for individual amateur entrepreneurs and may even impair the formation of green agency by discouraging the intense involvement and the culture of activism that create green identity. Weston (1989) uses the example of Friends of the earth which moved from being an amateur, evangelical ecocentric pressure group in the 1970s to a professional pragmatist organisation which is run virtually like any other modern company. As Hannigan notes "Environmental claims makers are more likely to take the form of professional social movements with paid administrative and research staffs, sophisticated fund-raising programmes and strong, institutionalised links to both legislators and the mass media. Some groups even use door to door canvassers who are paid an hourly wage...Campaigns are planned in advance, often with pseudo-military fashion. Grassroots participation is not encouraged beyond 'puppet membership' with control centralised in the hands of a core group of full time activists." pp44

The professionalisation could also inadvertently be supporting attempts by UK government and their advisors to contain environmental debates within the narrow confines of economic techniques and positivistic natural science, so denying the moral

and epistemological complexity of the issues at stake. Environmental groups have enlisted scientific including economic experts to help them defend environmental causes. Weston's (1989, p44) history of Friends of the Earth documents how its board wanted to reinforce ' heartfelt views with sound scientific research'. FoE and Greenpeace have used informed expertise at public enquiries into road, airport, nuclear power stations and other developments. Generally, however, they have been outgunned by the sheer financial capacity of their opponents, usually large commercial interests or government departments, to buy more expertise (Pepper 1996). Technical disputes as Wynne (1982) has shown do have a function. They constitute a ritual which helps secure public acceptance for potentially damaging projects such as the Thermal Oxide Reprocessing Plant (THORP), approved of after the Windscale public enquiry. The pro-nuclear lobby repeatedly claims possession of rationality, demanding debate of the hard facts alone. This means taken for granted assumptions are not changeable. As Yearley (1991) puts it, science has been an unreliable friend to the environmental movement. Grass roots campaigners become cut off from the paid staff at the national offices of environmental NGOs. Seeing the NGOs use the same language and basing their arguments in the same framework as those promoting a particular development can leave a local campaigner seeing little difference between the NGO and the corporation. Most of the literature about this split in the environmental NGO movement comes from the United States. In his 1995 book *American Environmentalism at the Close of the Twentieth Century* Mark Dowie (1995) argues that mainstream groups were courting irrelevancy. By turning their backs on the grass roots in favour of partnerships with corporate America, they were diluting the militancy needed to force fundamental change. In a subsequent interview in Hertsgaard (1999, p309), Dowie stands by his original analysis but adds:

> The international listing of environmental NGOs is thicker than the Manhattan phone book. So the infrastructure is there and the popular consiousness exists so it is just a matter of putting them together. In the United States the radical edge of environmentalism didn't disappear during the 1990s. In fact thousands of small groups have formed to oppose clear-cut logging toxic waste dumps and other single issues. Now these groups are joining into networks that magnify their impact enormously. And the grass roots membership of groups like Sierra Club and National Wildlife Federation are pulling their leadership away from compromising postures.

What is the relationship of the study area groups with the national environment movement. Four of the groups interviewed were local groups of national

organisations: Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the Wildlife Trust. Friends of the Earth groups were active in three towns during the study period, Luton, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard. During the study period the Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable groups merged to form South Bedfordshire Friends of the Earth. There was no Friends of the Earth coverage in Bedford or north Bedfordshire. Friends of the Earth did not run an office and did not receive funding support from the head office although the option of small grants for specific projects was available. Friends of the Earth members nationally were not automatically joined to their local group, which had a separate membership structure. This meant FoE locally had a much smaller Bedfordshire membership than CPRE or the Wildlife Trusts even though nationally they have similar figures. They have the option to pay to mail national supporters over specific events or campaigns out of local group funds if the material is considered suitable by head office. The proportion of Friends of the Earth members who are active is in fact lower that those who are active in political parties such as the Labour Party (Doherty, 1999). The extent to which national FoE campaign issues were prioritised varied with local groups. Dunstable FoE for example expressed pride in the fact that they carried out every national day of action. National days of action are where local groups are provided with materials such as postcards, petitions and posters to carry out an event in their town, usually in the form of a stall. In a recent study of FoE Jordan and Maloney (1996) dismiss this approach as a form of the 'mail order protest business' However, during the course of the interviews, it appeared that the majority of the campaigning time was spent on local issues, often unrelated to national priorities.

On only one occasion, when hearings were held into the proposals to build the Dunstable Bypass through Blows Down site of special scientific interest did national office staff take a greater interest in Bedfordshire and appeared at hearings concerning the future of the scheme. At that time the campaign against the Newbury was concluding and concern about other damaging bypasses such as Salisbury, Hereford, a string of connecting bypasses along the south coast, and Dunstable briefly became an important issue for head office. There was also a campaign at the same time by the biodiversity section at FoE head office to increase legal protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Dunstable provided a case study of a site directly threatened by development. Dunstable was used as one of a number of case studies to ask for

funds from supporters although none of these funds were allocated back to Bedfordshire. However, no interest was shown by Friends of the Earth in the environmental damage to Flitwick Moor SSSI by a proposed housing development. Housing was not a national priority issue and no systematic effort was made by the biodiversity section to engage with threats to individual SSSIs. There was concern expressed by one of the Friends of the Earth interviewees about the potential disapproval from head office.

> I mean residents groups tend to be... I mean they haven't got a reputation to keep up have they. They haven't got to sort of stick to their contract. Whereas I always felt very aware there were a few people in our group who were a bit inclined to shoot their mouths off. And I always had this thing in the back of my mind about not bringing FoE into disrepute.

CPRE runs a county-wide branch and attempts to run three district branches. Unlike most CPRE county branches Bedfordshire was established in the 1970s specifically as a CPRE county branch. Most of the other branches come from the incorporation of former county societies such as the Hertfordshire Society or Surrey Society. This resulted in the lack of local rural elites that can dominate the county society system. Only two of the district branches – South Bedfordshire and Mid Bedfordshire were currently active. CPRE ran a small office with a part time paid member of staff, who was on long term sick leave at the time of the field work. They also had two volunteers both with a strong knowledge of the planning system who work part time on CPRE campaigns. CPRE Bedfordshire receives funding automatically when a member joins CPRE nationally, which provides funding for the office, staff member and publications. CPRE campaigns in Bedfordshire appeared to be only loosely influenced by the priorities of their head office with none of the three CPRE interviewees mentioning national direction of campaigns. The main national issues CPRE focuses on are transport, housing, waste and mineral extraction. These very closely matched the local priorities, suggesting CPRE head office has molded its campaign priorities around the pressures affecting groups like Bedfordshire CPRE - those in the south east of the country.

Greenpeace, by contrast with Friends of the Earth and CPRE, have almost all their activity directed by head office. There is limited flexibility in choosing dates and times of activities or very specific targets e.g. which supermarket to protest outside

about GM food. The high profile media actions which Greenpeace are associated with are composed of hand picked staff and individuals. They are not an expression of local group activism. Their head office does not permit them to comment on local planning applications, to lobby local elected members about local issues or to comment on strategic documents in Bedfordshire. Their volunteers receive expenses back from head office to cover travel, phone calls and postage. There is also the expectation that Greenpeace branches will be involved in fundraising for Greenpeace nationally. The only exception to this was when national office became interested in proposals to use Bedfordshire's landfill space to dump radioactive waste. This conflict occurred before the start of the study period. Some societies have very loose affiliations, for example the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire was affiliated to the Royal Society for Nature Conservation. Following a review of its operations and extensive consultations with its 48 associated wildlife trusts, RSNC resolved to become a more campaigns focused organisation in the 1990s.The group has been involved in campaigns about meadows, peatlands, woodlands and water issues. To date these campaigns have met with little success, often lacking a clear focus and not organised in such a way that local wildlife trusts can practically get involved (Micklewright, 1993). The notable exception to this was the campaign to give badgers better protection through introducing a successful private members bill. The majority of the financial resources went to the county-wide body of the Wildlife Trust with a relatively less financially powerful national body.

Among the other groups interviewed, about three-quarters had some formal links to another body. In the case of the conservation societies based in villages it was common for them to have some affiliation to one of the Countryside Projects such as Ivel Valley Countryside Project, the Bedfordshire CPRE, the Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust or the Bedfordshire Natural History society. Both the countryside management projects and the Wildlife Trust provided help for local groups in applying for environmental grants from charitable trusts and provided occasional networking opportunities in the form of day conferences. Other affiliations by Bedfordshire groups included to the Civic Trust, which provided some newsletters and occasional national or regional conferences which groups attended. There did not appear to be any code of conduct required

between the Civic Trust and affiliated societies. There was some suspicion expressed about the Civic Trust by some groups interviewed because its director used to be a senior planner in Bedfordshire County Council. Perhaps this lead to lower take-up of membership by civic groups than in other areas. Those groups which had a strong focus on practical conservation were affiliated to the national charity the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). There were also some specialist affiliations to national organisations for example the Bedfordshire Bat Group was affiliated to the Bat Conservation Trust. The Marston Vale Community Forest was also part of a network that brought together people from other community forests across the country.

What styles of campaigning do groups use

One important question in interviewing environmental groups was to ask them to describe the main activities of the group. It was anticipated this was a simple question that would help break the ice between interviewer and interviewee. In many cases this resulted in a statement of aims rather than giving a clear picture about what the group actually did. Similarly when asking individuals what their role was within the group this often elicited a one word answer of chairman or vice chairman without giving an indication about what that job involved. It became clear that the groups did not spend much time reflecting on the range of campaign options open to them. Given the level and persistence of environmental threats in Bedfordshire it was anticipated at the start of the research that a range of campaign activities would be undertaken from writing letters to councillors and officers, oganising public meetings, producing petitions, taking part in street stalls and holding demonstrations. In the academic literature about local environmental protest considerable attention has been directed towards protest and direct action (Ingalsbee, 1996; Doherty 1999; North, 1998; Holloway, 1998; Maples, 1998; Seel, 2000). In recent years this trend towards professionalisation in the environment movement has been accompanied by a surge of less formally organised activism – particularly the anti roads movement. Direct action mobilisation against new infrastructure developments, particularly road development has forced a re-evaluation of government policy, with the DoT's programme, Roads for prosperity being drastically reduced (Wall, 1999). Holloway (1998) argues that:

> For groups such as Earth First! the 'normal' means of change are a source of considerable disillusionment and frustration..... The emergence of such militancy has lead some commentators to talk of the 'new protest' 'cultures of resistance, or an emerging Do It Yourself Culture (Grant, 1995; Hill, 1995; McKay, 1996). Whether or not one can make such claims there is undoubtedly a significant number of people especially in the environment movement, who have become disenchanted with the conventional ways of making a difference. (p1199)

However, only one of the 28 interviewees had regularly participated in direct action although none of those occasions were in Bedfordshire. The interviewee who had frequently participated was the only one to show a detailed understanding of the makeup of the direct action network involving groups such as Reclaim the Streets and Earth First! For the other interviewees who raised the issue, direct action was seen as being synonymous with Greenpeace. This quote from one of the village societies with a strong interest in nature conservation illustrates some of the ambiguity towards direct action felt by some of the wildlife and village societies.

> I think man, and this includes woman, still has this belief they can do anything and that development and economic development is paramount and wildlife groups do have to be militant in the way that Greenpeace.....is not always rational and maturely projected

This general support but lack of knowledge was a common feature among the interviewees, illustrated in another quote from a village society, who expressed general support for one of the group's members who did carry out direct action. The way he spoke about her even suggested that interviewee viewed having a high court injunction was a status symbol.

> She's got a high court injunction against her protesting in areas. Very strong Greenpeace person. A good conservationist, recycles everything.

Some interviewees felt the environmental movement's reputation for direct action hampered their ability to enter into constructive dialogue with the local authority.

> AC: They had a negative impression of your group from.....
> Interviewee: Yes, much more as if we were going to do Greenpeace type activities But, um, you know we had courteous exchanges of letters... They are not so frightened of us now. They sort of think we might actually be reasonable people.

Only a minority of groups engaged in what can be described as traditional pressure group activities such as public meetings, stalls and petitions. Only Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace appeared to regularly run stalls in the local high streets. Only

about a third of groups ran any kind of stall for example, at a green fair or village show, during the course of a year. Only four groups – Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, The Consortium, and Action for Rural Kempston made use of petitions as a campaigning tool. Only Action for Rural Kempston and The Consortium, used petitions to lobby on local issues, in both cases housing issues. Only one of the groups, The Consortium appeared to use public meetings as a regular part of their campaigning toolkit. The Consortium reported several well attended public meetings with between 60 and 120 members of the public present. These were without high profile national speakers or celebrities support and on the rather remote implications of the SERPLAN housing figures on the area. The fact that these meetings were well attended suggests that the public are not fatigued by this traditional means of engagement and are not only interested once specific sites have been identified. A minority of the other village groups had held a public meeting at some point since 1995 usually in response to some external development threat. Some of the lack of use of public meetings as a campaigning toolkit may be the lack of suitable facilities in the villages illustrated in the following quote from a village society.

> We have got difficulties because we have to meet in this house or in one of the barns because we haven't got a village hall.

One of the most surprising features to emerge from the interviews was the small number of targets selected by environmental groups. The key decision makers about local planning decisions are the officers and elected members in the district council. A majority of groups directed almost all their attention in writing a formal response to the officers involved. This focus on officers completely at the expense of elected members was hard to account for. One interviewee who said they spent two and a half days a week responding to planning documents said about councillors:

> No, I wouldn't even know who they are to be honest. We might come across them indirectly but. I wouldn't even know who they are. I have never been to any council meetings. I wouldn't even know where to find out to be honest.

Other interviewees expressed similar views, feeling it was improper to do anything other than make comments in writing to the appropriate officer. None of the groups appeared to make the most of the opportunities open to them including having meetings with planning officers involved in the case, writing to those councillors on the planning committee, writing to the ward councillors or speaking at the council

meeting where the decisions were made. None of the groups mentioned encouraging members and supporters to attend the planning meeting where the decision will be made to demonstrate to councillors the strength of local feeling about the issue and to ensure that procedures are correctly observed. All of these basic campaign steps are recommended in several introductory guides to influencing planning applications including Speer and Dade (1994), The Land is Ours by Moyse (1999), and CPRE (1998)

For strategic schemes the County Council officers and members are also involved. Only four of the groups reported a regular lobbying of the County Council, again focused mostly on officers and responses to official documents. The local MP is often a high profile and well respected member of their local political party so an important figure to express support for the campaign. The MP can also assist the group by raising issues with ministers at a national level and responding favourably to the groups aims when asked about the issue by the local press. Only two of the groups, The Consortium and Action for Rural Kempston, appeared to be active in lobbying their MP over local environmental issues. Other groups mentioned writing letters to the MP and one interviewee had lobbied their MP over national environmental issues. Other options include lobbying the regulatory bodies such as English Nature and the Environment Agency to persuade them that their comments should be along similar lines to the group's comments. Only one group mentioned doing this and inviting English Nature and the Environment Agency to a site meeting to look at a proposed housing site. None of the groups appeared to have an effective strategy for dealing with the media. The majority of the media work was reactive writing a letter or responding to a telephone call from the local paper. When asked about active members most groups listed various posts on their committee – treasurer, newsletter editor, chairman but no group identified an individual responsible for media work. Journalists frequently attended council meetings where they knew controversial decisions would be made. By not attending council meetings local environmental groups missed another opportunity to get their message across to the media. None of the groups had managed to interest the national media, the trade press or the green/alternative press in their campaigns. This is perhaps unsurprising as national media coverage tends to follow from a high media profile at a regional level or from extensive trade press coverage. None of the groups mentioned the Internet as a

campaign tool although some of the groups including the Countryside Management Projects and The Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire Wildlife Trusts have web sites which provide basic information about the organisation.

Several of the groups mentioned awareness raising events. The most common of these was walks in both urban and rural areas to increase local appreciation of natural and historical features. A guided walk lead by a local group member was carried out by 12 of the 24 groups. In some instances this constituted a major part of the group's activities such as the Ivel Valley Countryside Project. In the case of the village societies it was only once or twice a year and often linked to some other event organised by the town or district council that could provide free publicity for a wider audience. Other awareness raising activities included signs on the village green and nature reserves, displays in local libraries and self guided walks leaflets. Two of the groups had a visitors centre – Marston Vale Community Forest and Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust. This provided an additional opportunity for imparting information about the organisations work to the public. One organisation the Bedfordshire Natural History Society, produced publication quality books, the most recent of which was a popular volume aimed at increasing interest in Bedfordshire's wildlife. The majority of groups spent a considerable amount of their time and money on producing a good quality newsletter. This was seen as an important means of keeping members informed about the activities of the group. In the case of three of the village societies they provided at least one free newsletter per year to every household whether they made a financial contribution to the group or not. This was not true of every group. A Friends of the Earth interviewee mentioned the difficulties their group faced over newsletters and membership:

> We have steering group meeting which is usually about five or six of us but really we should be doing a lot more. That is the reason I started the database to sort out just who really were our members, and send them all a demand for some money but we never get around to it because we are all so busy all the time. So it's just one disaster after another. The council is just so mad on development and also consultations.

Some other miscellaneous tactics were employed by the groups. In terms of legal options one group had used the UK legal system in an attempt to block a large industrial development, including appearing at the high court. Two other groups were taking legal advise concerning housing development issues. One group, CPRE had

successfully used the European legal system to argue that proposals for a football stadium required an environmental impact assessment under EU directives. The Consortium arranged a meeting with then planning minister Nick Raynsford and senior civil servants. Some of the groups reported lobbying local Friends of the Earth, CPRE and Greenpeace to support their campaign. The village societies and single issue groups were generally dissatisfied with the responses they received. Where they wanted practical support they were often only supplied with information. The local village groups and single issue groups were unaware of the incomplete geographical coverage provided by FoE and the licensing constraints imposed by head office on Greenpeace. In interview Friends of the Earth and CPRE also stated they would not become involved with very small schemes that only had local significance. They were concerned about their reputations and wanted their comments to be taken as a serious issue by the planning authority. They also wished to avoid being drawn into disputes between neighbours. Only one group had produced their own technical report to challenge the technical expertise of the council and developer. In this instance the group felt the traffic model 'MOVER' promoted by the developer and local authority did not accurately represent what would happen to traffic in the area. One of the group was a computer programmer with a specialist interest in fluid dynamics. He wrote his own computer programme called 'STOPPER' to challenge the council's figures.

Can the tactics used by environmental groups can be explained theoretically in terms of Political Opportunity Structures. Tarrow (1994, p19-20) defines political opportunity structure as

> ... consistent but not necessarily formal or permanent dimensions of the political environment, that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action, by affecting their expectations for success or failure.

The idea of a political opportunity structure has been operationalised by different researchers. Balser (1997), for example, describes four dimensions of political opportunity structure: challenger access to the political system, ability to enact social change through legislation, influential allies within government, instability in electoral alignments. Van Der Heijden (1997) meanwhile, in an analysis of the political opportunity structures open to environmental groups in four European countries, highlights how the formal institutional structures of the state affect campaigning options. The level of vertical territorial decentralisation affects the

openings available for campaigns at a federal/ regional level and at a local level. A simple indicator of the level of centralisation is the proportion of taxes raised by different levels of government. In Germany and Switzerland the central government share of taxation is 51 and 41 per cent respectively. This compared to XX% in the UK leading to a local government that is mainly involved in implementation. This concentration of power and resources leads to a concentration of NGO activity at the level of the nation state. The second important factor is the horizontal concentration of state power. How is power divided between the legislative (MPs), the executive (civil servants) and the judiciary? In Germany the judiciary provides a route for environmental groups to criticise the governments' actions as unlawful. In the UK the legal system does not provide a useful route. Legal challenges called judicial reviews are expensive for groups to finance, over £20,000, and can only consider procedural aspects of the decision-making. The nature of the electoral system is a third factor affecting group participation. In an open system there is the possibility for the emergence of a green party. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that there was no active green party in Bedfordshire during the study period where like the rest of the UK a first past the post system operates. In a first past the post system the climate is very difficult for new minority parties. Perhaps more surprisingly none of the groups used local and national elections to try and get all candidates to support key campaign objectives. The final point of entry, the possibility to call a referendum, constitutes an additional point of access for environmental groups. Referendums had not been used by any groups in the study area despite the option being open to them. While this literature on political opportunity structures helps explain some of the pattern of campaigning activities undertaken, that many groups kept away from legal options, it does not account for the absence of many other forms of traditional campaigning activity.

The importance of housing as a policy issue to environmental groups

As stated earlier, part of the interest in the case study area was the large number of pressing environmental issues: mineral extraction, landfill, the east-west rail link, the expansion of Luton Airport, the plans for the 'Kollerdome' stadium near Luton, and plans for several bypasses including Leigthon Buzzard, Dunstable and Bedford. How do groups divide their attention between local and national issues? Only the Friends

of the Earth and the Greenpeace group expressed concern at national and international environmental issues. For the Greenpeace group this had involved mainly genetically modified food and the drilling of oil in the North Atlantic Frontier. For the Friends of the Earth groups, they expressed interest in national issues such as the Birmingham Northern Relief road as well as international issues such as free trade and tropical deforestation. The majority of environmental campaigning activity by the 25 interviewees and their groups seemed to be directed towards local and sometimes regional issues. For two of the groups, Bedfordshire Conservation Volunteers and Luton and Dunstable Conservation Volunteers, housing was not an issue they worked on at all. These two groups only very rarely became involved in the planning system or strategies like Agenda 21 at all. For other groups other development pressures outweighed housing as the most important policy issue. In the case of the Henlow Conservation Society their primary concern is preventing an industrial development in the village, although they have since expanded to looking at other planning issues as well as practical conservation in Henlow. For the two groups based in Leighton Buzzard, Friends of the Earth and the Leighton Buzzard Preservation Society the issues of the bypass and an Industrial Development by Boss Trucks took priority over housing issues. This probably reflects the green belt status of the land surrounding Leighton Buzzard and relatively low levels of completions. Similarly, for the Arlesey Conservation for Nature, industrial development and nuisance from an existing landfill were equally important to housing issues. For two of the groups, The Consortium and Action for Rural Kempston housing is the only issues on which they work. Action for Rural Kempston was established as a protest group against plans for a major housing development in the Biddenham loop. The Consortium is a network of concerned individuals and parish councils concerned about the high levels of housing development in Bedfordshire associated with the most recent review of the regional planning guidance. This more mixed view of environmental priorities contrasted with the local authority interviews. All the elected members and officers interviewed said housing was the most important environmental issue or listed housing jointly with one or two other issues.

When the groups did work on housing a range of different issues were raised. Within this focus on local/ national issues there was a very high priority given to wildlife concerns. This is in part because those groups who are better resourced, including the

countryside management projects and the Wildlife Trust, have wildlife as their central remit. The village groups and those set up to object to specific developments also give wildlife issues a very high focus. This means that for housing, waste, transport, industrial development and other issues, the impact on wildlife is given a much higher priority than, say, energy efficiency or water pollution. Those with a single focus had specialised concerns, for example the Bedfordshire bat group were concerned exclusively with bat's feeding areas and bat roosts. They were most interested in developments where older buildings were being demolished to make way for new residential or industrial development and the possibility of roosts in the older buildings. In contrast most of the village based societies tried to raise as many environmental issues as possible. One commenting about a development of 15 houses said

> The houses themselves were an intrusion into open countryside. It was an overdevelopment of the site. There was insufficient landscaping. It borders Kingfisher Way, which is part of the Ivel Valley Countryside Project. We were very unhappy about the intrusion into habitat, and what was going to happen to the rest of the land that was not included in the development package. What safeguards were we going to have to prevent future development. (Village Society)

An interviewee from Earth First! was very cynical about the way local residents suddenly display an interest in a wide range of environmental issues

> They tend to grab at any straw going. They'll actually do a bit of research, learn as much as they can about their environment all of a sudden....I think they'll do a bit of reading up on other people's protests and they'll actually try and drag in as many aspects from whether its living or just stood still and growing, even the rolling vista, even though you don't have any legal right to a view....anything and everything, ancient rights of way, ancient uses of the area, important areas for either plants or wildlife, uhm, social history, natural history, anything and everything they can clutch on to they will use as ammunition....they suddenly become very wise and worldly about eco issues they were hither to not taking a blind bit of notice of

The effectiveness of environmental activism

How effective are environmental groups in getting their message across to the different levels of government, to business and to the public? As Evans (1992, p250) says:

> It is clear where the conservation movement now stands. As a piece of self perpetuating machinery, it has become highly successful and sophisticated

> but, as a means of ringing the changes in official actions and attitudes towards our natural heritage, it remains largely ineffectual. In spearheading the movement, the societies have marketed themselves to success. They perform sterling work at the local level in redeeming some of our past mistakes and offering hope for the future in the form of more positive objectives. But their fortune in influencing the official policies of our administrators has been limited to say the least.

However, not every critic of the environment movement measures their success in terms of policy victories. For Eyerman and Jamison (1991) new social movements are processes of defining and developing new ways of living and new values rather than strategies to ask/ persuade/ force the state to grant their demands. The goal of a social movement is not primarily to achieve an end such as stopping a road, but as a sign to society of what the movement thinks should be, how society should be organised as either information (a suggestion for change that others can act on), a practical demonstration to show what is possible, or to reflect society back on itself and make others reflect on what the movement argues for. As a result participation in a movement is not a means to an end, but the end in itself – creating the sign in information society (North, 1998). What evidence is there that the environmental groups in Bedfordshire are achieving either of these aims?

A group's ability to affect real change appeared hampered by the very small numbers of individuals involved. The cultural constraints on public environmentalism have been less studied than economic constraints (Eden, 1993). Culturally shared perceptions place much pro-environmental behaviour on the fringe of society as an eccentric minority interest and even as a source of ridicule. This makes pro - environmental behaviour more difficult to adopt in a mainstream social context halting the spread of public, especially organised environmentalism. This was reflected in some of the interviews. For example, an interviewee from Friends of the Earth, described his embarrassment at a colleague who dressed up in a parrot costume in the High Street to demonstrate about tropical deforestation. Some of the reluctance to engage with the press and in other public forums such as meetings or stalls may be due to a lack of willingness on behalf of environmental group members to appear very prominently in the public arena. While it is hard to quantify the effectiveness of the Friends of the Earth days of action and the Greenpeace stalls in changing individual behaviour it appears that the environment movement as a whole was poor at

promoting high levels of public participation in local environmental issues. Even those involved in local policy such as the MPs, local press and councillors and officers were hard pressed to remember the names of more than one or two environmental groups. Even then they often got the names of the groups wrong. They were often unaware of the priorities and structure of the group, frequently confusing Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, for example.

If the environmental groups are not changing public awareness or values how successful are they at direct lobbying of local government to achieve policy change? Much as been written about how effective local environmental groups are in this sphere. In recent work, Johnson (1999) examines public participation in local environmental conflicts in the United States. She argues that recent studies of citizen participation suggest that present day social fragmentation reduces societal capacity to address the negative consequences of private actions. As these consequences have grown increasingly problematic environmental protection advocacy has exponentially increased. Notions of public or citizen participation bearing an ethic of responsibility have drawn attention to the consequences of private actions and the trade-offs involved in resolving environmental problems. She addresses critics claims that beneath the veneer of rhetoric and requirements to ensure citizen participation is the political reality of a conscious gap between the public and elites – officials, experts, leaders and officials who hold the real power and actually make the important decisions.

How did the groups in Bedfordshire evaluate their own success? They interpreted this question of success as was the development or policy document modified or dropped, rather that drawing on any broader concerns about societal changes. Most of the groups accepted that is was difficult to know whether a decision had been made because of their campaign or whether officers, councillors and planning enquiry inspectors would have come to the same conclusions without their existence. In larger cases there were often several groups writing to respond to a planning application in broadly similar ways so no one group felt it could take the credit. It was also unclear how broader changes in the economic climate made developers less willing to continue to push for controversial schemes such as the Kolerdome stadium. A Friends

of the Earth interviewee in common with many other groups found it much easier to influence some areas of local government policy than others

> It depends what the things are. Um for something that doesn't cost too much like cycle racks Maybe or they put some trees down the high street. You know the sort of things that people might actually say, that's quite good. You know they take those sort of ideas on board quite easily now. And its not cost them too much money

Another Friends of the Earth Interviewee felt that the groups ability to make policy change was hampered by the culture of the local authority

> I think they take us quite seriously. I've always regarded [district council] as a bit of a backwater. Ideas tend to wash up here sort of some time after they have everywhere else... The council is not at the forefront of anything so far as I can make out. Its not a very go ahead council... Just think of an idea, er,... sort of protecting children's play areas and keeping dogs out and that other councils did that years ago and we're just getting round to it.

An interviewee from one of the village societies, in common with many other interviewees felt frustrated by the bureaucratic procedures of the local authority.

> You often get the feeling that they have come out to ask for consultation, not as lip service but you think you have put forward some quite relevant planning reasons why something should be refused or modified. And nothing seems to happen or your views are not taken on board. Now, at one time you didn't even used to get feedback from the officers as to why your views were not taken into account. That has now changed and you do start to get feedback from officers as to why this application has been allowed, or it wasn't changed. So at least you've got the chance to think 'oh well maybe they were right' or ' no I don't agree with that but'.

Yet some groups appear to be included in decision-making while others are excluded. How can this relationship between environmental campaign groups and officials be better understood? In the Bedfordshire in depth study research, the primary target for environmental groups was the local planning authority, who would then hopefully put pressure on the builders to raise environmental standards. Other targets such as other government agencies, the press, the wider public, MPs and the development interests were considered secondary targets by most groups. What is the nature of the relationship between the environmental groups and the local planning authority? During the interviews a number of questions were asked devised to investigate the relationship between these two actors. To explain the differential access to policy makers and officials by environmental groups the idea of insider and outsider groups

has been developed. Assimilation techniques used by elites include facilitation, subsidising or providing other material support to the group; assimilation, the regulatory consulting of environmental groups in search of common solutions to problems; finally co-operation, the inclusion of environmental groups onto official boards or panels. This idea of insider and outsider groups has been explored at the European level by Broscheid and Coen (2003). They argue that there has been increased differentiation between insiders and outsiders. Those who refuse to be co-opted run the risk of being marginalised. In terms of the environment movement this can be seen in the co-operation of transnational environmental groups such as WWF with trans-national companies

Examining this issue at a local level is Buller and Hoggart's (1986) work on development control in West Sussex. They question whether as an aggregate the development control decisions of a planning department favour particular social groups. Although planners may wish to mediate between different groups and make decisions in the public interest, their decisions almost inevitably become an amalgam of aggregate interests of the most powerful groups that participate. In most studies of capitalist societies, production interests have precedence over consumption interests. Production interests would include business activities such as building houses, industrial units, quarrying and energy generation. Consumption interests are the leisure uses of the countryside by those who live there and from neighbouring urban areas and include activities such as walking, cycling, birdwatching or simply enjoying the views. The rural environment provides a situation where this is reversed and consumption interests take precedence. The local state has a dominant orientation around consumption issues. The use of the countryside for leisure activities takes precedence over the interests of the construction industry.

This is in part due to local state policy makers desire for a stable policy making environment, discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven. This can be explained by research carried out by organisational theorists, which shows that institutions manage their environments in order to reduce uncertainty in policy making. If a local authority wishes to maintain a stable environment it must allow for the formation of pressure groups and their potential to disturb the policy environment. Councils attempt to incorporate more powerful groups into the policy making process in order to socialise

them to the authorities' own vocabulary and policy objectives. More recent work by Rydin (1995) shows a similar pattern with some groups regularly consulted by local government about proposals for developments and other groups excluded. Rydin interviewed a considerable diversity of groups: those who were linked to national organisations and those who were not; those who worked on single issues such as cycling and those who had a broader environmental remit and those who carried out practical conservation tasks as well as campaigning. Those groups who were included such as a civic society had a much more positive view about their relationship with the local authority and felt they were achieving real change.Those groups who were excluded included a transport campaigning group linked to a national organisation and nature conservation groups. They did not feel the council listened to their comments when they responded to documents and felt the council had not changed its policies to respond to increased environmental concern

Did this incorporation of the more powerful groups occur in Bedfordshire? Only one of the groups had a day-to-day working relationship with the local planning authority. This group always received the planning list from the local planning authority, often with questions from the officers about specific applications. They were also involved in the preparation of other documents such as the supplementary planning guidance. The relationship appeared so close that it became questionable whether the environmental pressure group was carrying out the work that would normally be done by a local authority nature conservation officer. They received most of their funding from the local planning authority, however the two other countryside management groups with a similar funding situation did not appear to be so closely incorporated. Some of the more active town and village societies also showed a significant degree of incorporation. When asked whether the group was involved at early stages of strategic plans, for example, by having meetings with officers, interviewee from a well established village society responded:

> Sometimes, but whether they do or not depends how forcefully we invite ourselves. But we are hoping to go and talk to Richard Watts who is the director of Bedford Strategic planning about the issues for the structure plan review. And of course we know him very well and we have been liasing with him and the planners at Milton Keynes and it has to be said the district planners on the RPG issues... We can [have meetings]... We certainly can if we push for it. I wouldn't say its done every time as effectively as we might partly because well we aren't as many as we

> should be. As I say we feel thin on the ground, there are more consultations coming at every stage but we do have very good relations.

Those groups with a mainly wildlife focus also had a fairly close working relationship with the local planning authorities:

> It varies from district to district and it can vary from planning officer to planning officer depending on who you are dealing with but I think in general the group is on most if not all lists as consultees. Occasionally we get missed out and we might hear of an application from a resident or maybe another countryside management project or something and we have to ask for it. But generally we do get sent things we haven't asked for. For example they just arrive in the post so they have been pretty good on that side of things. (Village society with strong wildlife focus)

The majority of groups were never approached by the local authority. This applied independently of whether groups had a narrow or wide remit, narrow or wide geographical area or affiliation to national bodies. An interviewee from a civic society said in response to a question about getting planning information for the local authority:

> Interviewee: Occasionally yes. We keep up to date by looking at the Bedford on Sunday which prints out what is going on.
> AC: Have you asked them to send you the list and they don't send it
> Interviewee: Well they do send it yes. I was lucky at one time because I know this councillor and he always gave me his list, but he has had a heart attack and retired so I don't get his list, but they are supposed to send us that list which dosen't come through very regularly but that dosen;t mean we don't keep our ear to the ground...
> AC: When the county council and the district council have been preparing local planning doucments have they ever invited you to meetings when they are still being prepared
> Interviewee: Not to my knowledge no.

An interviewee from one of the village societies highlights the problems faced by the majority of groups who did not have someone involved full time with the group who had a good knowledge of planning. When asked if the council tried to involve them she said:

> Interviewee: I think they do try to involve us at an early stage. I think the problem sometimes is that the time scales are too short for consultation, and often the documents they have sent out are just too complicated for amateurs to respond to. It's all right if you are a professional and you have got your agent doing it for you, but if you are an amateur trying to wade through pages and pages of documents is extremely difficult.
> AC: Are you ever invited to meetings by the council on strategic issues
> Interviewee: No

An interviewee from Friends of the Earth also felt there were problems for environmental groups who did not have full time staff but had a very different perspective on the issue of jargon.

> Interviewee: We are really the only environmental group that seriously interacts with the district council. I've been interacting with the council because I have the time to go along there in office hours.
> AC: Do the district council take the trouble to explain the jargon to you. Are you familiar with the processes that are going on.
> Interviewee: Until recently its been the other way round. It's been us trying to coax them along. They have been so utterly passive you see. Having said that I had a very useful chat with the head of planning.
> AC: Do more established groups like yourself compromise more or less than groups who are set up to oppose a specific scheme.
> Interviewee: Yes I don't know. In general our policy has been to coax along..this is a more general comment I suppose....the district council rather than have a clash with them.
> AC: Is that because you have got to keep a working relationship with them.
> Interviewee: It isn't. Its trying to establish one. I think we are struggling to do so. Um, I mean things are gradually looking up there. You see it took a long time for us to get any contact with them.

So to sum up there were clear differences between insider and outsider groups in Bedfordshire. However, the view that local government needs to educate environmental groups into the jargon of sustainable development should be questioned. In their own view and from interview the groups appeared as knowledgeable if not more so than local government in many instances.

Conclusion Chapter Six

At the start of this chapter environmentalist were defined as people who in some sense spoke up for the environment. Evidence from the groups themselves and from the builders and those in local government who commented on their activities suggests they were speaking so quietly that very few people heard. Their impact on changing the policies of local government and the activities of house builders could at best be described as minimal. A number of explanations have been put forward in this chapter to explain why the environmental groups had so little influence on changing policies. Over all the numbers of people involved in campaigning was small which

undoubtedly had an impact. The groups themselves did little to address this with active membership drives and promotional activities. The active membership of groups was predominantly middle class and from people who had flexible working patterns to allow them to carry out campaigning activities during office hours. Too much should not be read into the class composition of the groups as this largely reflected the middle class composition of many of the rural areas they were active in rather than an exclusivity in the environment movement itself.

Another important factor in the environmental groups lack of impact, is a focus on other issues locally such as airport expansion, road developments, mineral extraction and maintain and improving existing wildlife sites. This stretched resources that were already thin leaving little time for housing campaigning where these other issued posed a major threat. Despite the well resourced and high profile nature of the national environmental organisations, little of that money or expertise seemed present at the local level. There appeared to be a tension between the rapidly shifting priorities of the national environmental groups in London and the more fixed priorities of the local groups. Although this did vary from group to group with some such as CPRE having local an national priorities more closely connected than others, for example Friends of the Earth. Coupled with this there seemed some ambiguity about what exactly national organisations thought their local groups were for: for fundraising; for carrying out nationally directed campaigns; for greater democratic accountability or for a combination of reasons. With the exception of the Wildlife Trust financial and other resources were strongly concentrated in the London head offices rather than locally or regionally.

There was no real evidence to support interpretations of the environment movement from the political right, that they are purely motivated by self interest and a desire to maintain personal property values. In their focus on local issues, many of the groups did however displayed the features of an enclave movement discussed earlier. In some interpretations that very local focus and a sense of value in the local could be seen as a strength (Little, 2003 pers comm). However it could also become a fatal weakness best illustrated by the two very similar adjacent village societies who planned to pay large amounts of money for legal advice about the same issues on the same housing development.

Even taking the constraints discussed above into account the groups often did not make the best use of the resources that were available locally. There were tensions between local environmental groups that in many cases limited their potential for collaborative working and sharing of resources. There appeared to be particularly limited joint working between the established groups such as CPRE, Friends of the Earth and the Wildlife Trust and groups set up to oppose specific schemes. Both potentially had much to gain from collaboration, the established groups could gain much needed new man power and enthusiasm for campaigning. The groups established to stop a particular development could gain much greater legitimacy and access to information about similar schemes in other parts of the county or region and the longer term knowledge of the environmental and political situation locally, possessed by the established groups. The established groups seemed nervous about their reputation if they became involved in a 'NIMBY' campaign. The single issues groups, with the exception of The Consortium made little effort to network and avoid accusations of parochialism.

The very limited campaign repertoire was however the single most important factor that limited the impact of the environmental groups campaigning. They relied heavily on very conventional routes and ignored other opportunities to bring environmental messages to the attention of policy makers. Simply following the procedures of the planning system and submitting written objections with no follow up lobbying and no effort to raise the profile of the issue locally left the environmental groups a marginalised part of the decision making process. This was particularly surprising given the large amount to time groups devoted to the formal planning process but with no follow up to try and improve success. A small number of the groups even thought this kind of 'political' activity was wrong and inappropriate and they should limit themselves to formally responding through the planning process. This accounts for why so few councillors or journalists could name any of the active local environmental groups or campaigns they had been involved with. This issue also raises wider questions about the current research literature on local environmental activism. This research paints a picture of direct action campaigners joining forces with middle class residents to produce dynamic and innovative campaigns. The reality on the ground in Bedfordshire was far more prosaic with the vast majority of

campaigners time spent responding to consultation documents, attending group meetings and objecting to planning applications.

So how is this important for the research as a whole. It means that local government and housebuilders are not receiving significant pressure from the environment movement at a local level to change their policies and activities. This marginal role for the local environmental activism does not discount the possibility of a role for national environmental lobbying for greener housing at a national level, which could still be a significant contributory factor but was largely beyond the scope of the thesis. For example, WWF have been working with volume house builders nationally and the Building Research Establishment in a campaign for one million sustainable homes. This should not be over-played however as while a small number of builders and local government interviewees mentioned campaigning by national environmental groups none mentioned them as a source of information they used to link housing and environmental issues, neither were they able to elaborate on what national environmental groups did. The environment movement has been widely identified by academics and other commentators as an important force for change (Begg, 2000, Cieri, 2000) that in this instance appears not to be operating effectively. A central role for environmental groups was also discussed in Chapter two by proponents of the New Ecological Paradigm including Dunlap and Catton (1979) and Schnaiberg (1980). A more marginal role for environmental groups, as just one of a series of partners is however more in keeping with the way that many ecological modernisation theorists perceive the movement.

Other sources of potential pressure such as the local press have also been largely discounted in Chapter Four as significant. This still leaves other sources of potential pressure on builders and local government such as trade and professional organisations. It also does not discount the possibility that local government and housebuilders would adopt pro-environmental activities of their own volition without the need for pressure from environmental groups or other sources. It is to the role of local government and the input they have in raising environmental standards that the thesis now turns.

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Chapter 7

Locally elected government and rural house building

This chapter will examine the ways in which local authorities act to raise environmental standards in new build in rural areas. A number of factors, which will be addressed in this chapter, contribute to the effectiveness of local authorities in achieving this aim. Firstly, how powerful are local authorities as actors? At the start of this research it was assumed that local authorities would have an important role in mediating between the conflicting interests of developers and civic or environmental groups. Part of the importance placed on local authorities stems from their position as central agents in the land use planning system. A central role for the land use planning system in mediating the conflicting interests over rural housing has certainly been highlighted by other researchers, including Abram and colleagues (1996). However, the possibility that other mechanisms, such as Agenda 21 forums, could play a part is also considered here. Much has been written about the changing role of the local state and this literature will be reviewed briefly. The Bedfordshire perspective on how powerful local authorities see themselves to be, as well as how other actors perceive them, will also be considered. The nature of decision making within local government is also significant because, if there are divisions between officers and members, this may weaken decision making, as may divisions between tiers of local government - town council, district council and county council. A further important consideration is how important housing is as a policy issue for local authorities. If other issues are afforded higher priority then only weak pressure may be applied to builders as the local government is pre-occupied with, say, transport operators or waste management companies. Having ascertained the importance of local authorities as actors and the importance of housing to them, the chapter also addresses a central question for this research; namely, do local authorities accept the precepts of ecological modernisation? In assessing local authorities' commitment to ecological modernisation, material from interviews, planning policy documents and the local media will be considered. Is should be noted here that some of the key commentators on ecological modernisation are ambivalent about the role of local action for

environmental enhancement. Spaargarren and Mol (1992 p 331), for example, argue that:

> the intensification of international social relations and the increasing level of time space distancing within modern societies make the realisation of these goals in the context of local experiments, which are thought to be exempt from power relations and market forces operating on a world wide basis less plausible.

Academically then there is disagreement between researchers on ecological modernisation, as well as on planning and the environment, concerning the role of local government. Even so, factors influencing the acceptance of ecological modernisation ideas by local government representatives will be examined. There are links here to Chapter Two where central government policy in relation to the environment was discussed. Finally this chapter examines the mechanisms used by local authorities to pressure builders. At the start of this research it is was assumed that the land use planning system would be the central arena in which builders, local authorities and environmental groups would interact and decisions would be made. The conclusion considers the overall success of local government in applying pressure given the conditions prevailing in Bedfordshire.

New forms of governance at the local level

Much has been written in the last 15 years about the changing role of the local state (Geddes, 1988; Cochrane, 1993; Stoker, Clark, 1994; 1995; Rhodes, 1996; DiGaetano, 2002). One way of looking at these changes has been suggested by Cloke (1989), who interprets political and economic change in Britain at two levels - that of the state and that of the government. It is at the state level that long-term shifts have emanated, regardless of party politics and dominant ideologies. Here Cloke stresses the importance of prevailing political cultures, as seen in the UK in the intrinsic support for land ownership and the facilitation of capital accumulation. At the government level, shorter-term change is more prevalent, with new ideologies in government influencing the state's response to changing events. One such example of a new ideology is the rise of 'anti-planning' sentiments, with one good exemplification being the White Paper *Lifting the Burden* (HM Government, 1985.) These anti-planning sentiments have partially survived the 1997 change of government. Also representing a change at government level, a number of researchers have pointed to the changing relationship between central and local government, as

central government has assumed increasing levels of power over local government (Clarke and associates, 1989; Painter, 1991; Batley and Stoker, 1992). Central government has directly removed responsibility for certain local state activities to the centre, in doing so creating new civil service agencies for employment, training and social security (Imrie & Raco, 1999). In addition to removing responsibilities, central government has changed the legislative framework to increase its control over the local state. In relation to environment and planning issues, this shift in power from local government to the centre has been explored by Abram and colleagues (1996). In examining the role of the county council, amenity groups, MPs and central government in relation to a new bypass in Buckinghamshire, the Abram group found a county council that followed government advise, by supporting an unpopular road scheme, only to lose credibility when central government withdrew its support for the road. Abram and colleagues argued that a local government had emerged that had been stripped of its powers by central government, had abused those powers it did retain, and retained little public confidence as a representative body. In other cases non-elected QUANGOs have taken over many areas of local state activity, examples including housing associations and urban development corporations. Such QUANGOs are now responsible for over £40 billion in public funds (Goodwin, 1998), a sum that almost matches that spent by democratically elected local government. In the light of the increased power of QUANGOs, some of these organisations were included in the pool from which this study drew its interviewees. One example is the Countryside Agency. Another is the non departmental public body, the Environment Agency, which has acquired regulatory powers previously held by local government as in the field of waste regulation. In policy areas where local government has maintained its responsibilities, the central government has increasingly used legislation, 'advice' and financial controls to restrict the autonomy of local councils (Goldsmith, 1986). Circulars and guidance are produced in an effort to clarify central government intentions with a constant flow of circulars linking the two levels of government. However Booth (2003) even goes as far as to argue that the circulars of the mid 1980s were characterised by the very general nature of the advise they offered coupled with what looked like thinly veiled threats. The introduction of PPGs has according to Booth done nothing to shift the centralising tendencies of the

early 1980s. This flow is supplemented by a range of informal contacts between central departments and local government officers. While there is broad consensus that a shift in the balance of power has occured, Leach (1996) has argued that local authorities have lost their providing role in some activity spheres, in others their regulatory and providing roles and responsibilities have been strengthened and enhanced. For instance for land use planning, Leach argues that planners retain significant regulatory capacities in adjusting planning proposals.

Instead of interpreting changes in local-central relationships simply as a shift in power from the local to the centre, an alternative interpretation is that a shift has occurred from government to governance. Governance refers to styles of governing that blur the boundaries between the public and the private sector (Stoker, 1996, Goodwin, 1998) These changing associations can be interpreted in terms of the construction of power, as advocated by those who adhere to actor network theory. Here power is vested in associations rather than in entities, because if an actor is to achieve a desired outcome then a network of entities must be constructed. Recent development in Foucauldian theories of government, including Barry and associates (1996), Dean (1999), Rose (1999) and Murdoch (2000), points out that if government is to govern it must find a way of mobilising domains that lie outside its borders. The idea that elites form networks is nothing new, nor are the ideas that elite networks tend to socialise together, work together and even live together (Hunter 1953, Stacey, 1960). What is important here is that elite networks are now seen as part of larger societal networks. The analysis of 'government' consequently requires attention to the means by which networked relationships are made and develop through spaces and practices that essentially lie outside the formal agencies of government. An important consideration in this shift to governance is a new relationship with civil society. As Goodwin (1998) points out, a number of new forums and partnerships that have been established offer clear evidence that a shift to governance is already happening in rural areas, with LEADER action groups, Rural Challenge, Rural Development Boards and Local Enterprise Companies providing examples of such initiatives. However, set against this note of optimism about new partnerships with civil society, a note of caution should be raised. This is that planning issues tend to galvanise opinion and reaction at particular points in time rather than forging an ongoing relationship between the

citizen and planning authorities (Paddison, 1983). How far a shift from government to governance can really be said to have occurred is consequently still a matter for empirical evaluation.

That said, it has to be acknowledged that a change in local-central relationships has occurred. Comparison of trends today with Saunders (1986) theory of the dual state is illustrative of this. For Saunders the politics of production was normally controlled at the nation state level while the politics of consumption was primarily localised. This distinction is no longer clear cut in the UK. For one, the local state has withdrawn from many of its consumption activities, handing them over to the private or voluntary sector, while local governments have at the same time become more involved in local economic development. For example, research by Hall and Hubbard (1996) identifies a shift in urban governance away from the local provision of welfare and services towards a more outward-oriented stance that was designed to foster and encourage local economic development. In Hall and colleagues' approach the local state assumes characteristics commonly associated with the private sector, such as risk-taking, inventiveness, promotion and profit motivation. Valler (1996) points to the central role here of the 1989 Local Government Act in providing a legal framework for local authorities to pursue economic development strategies, something that was previously non-existent. Similarly Cochrane (1993) has argued that local government places a premium on local entrepreneurial initiatives at the expense of explicit welfare policies. This blurring of the line between the private and public sector has occurred in housing policy, as public policy has become more reliant on private funding (Crook and Moroney, 1995). Local authorities are frequently no longer direct providers of services like housing but act as enabling bodies that specify and purchase services. This change in the role of local government is particularly apparent in the housing sector as local authority funding for council house construction has been reduced significantly (Gallent, 1997). With the decline in public sector housing no single body now has the ability to develop and implement local housing policies. A local authority may wish to see affordable housing built in certain villages but if no proposals are put forward by developers they will not be built.

Yet the implications of this new linkage between the public and private sector has been little explored in a rural setting (Goodwin, 1998). Much of the work examining the relationships between private companies and local government has come from an urban context. Here understanding the ethos that pervades governance networks has commonly been described by regime theory. Regimes are informal yet relatively stable coalitions, that are composed of elites drawn from the public and private sector. A regime is seen to have formed when a variety of local interests mesh together to form a relatively stable governing coalition, which involves a number of groups co-operating to introduce and implement policies to achieve their own ends (Judge et al, 1995; Davidson, 1996). Much of the original thinking about regimes came from the USA (Logan and Molotch, 1987), where city governments have to recruit businesses as coalition partners because of the inherent fiscal weakness of the local state (Clark and Ferguson, 1983). This point is echoed by Dowding () who argues the growth machine approach to the study of local government has particular advantages in the United States where local government is fragmented into a large number of jurisdictions, a largely depoliticised local bureaucracy and a heavy reliance on taxes raised locally from businesses. (Ward et al., 1999). However one critical difference that has been reported for the UK concerns the position of local government. Case studies of many UK local authorities have show that the key, co-ordinating role in many of the resulting urban regimes was still the local authority (Hall and Hubbard, 1996). The local state had not been captured by coalitions of private capital, but continues to take responsibility for promoting local economic development. Indeed, as in the USA, some UK studies have shown that not all regimes are growth oriented, but can favour growth management strategies (Hall and Hubbard., 1996). Studies in Bristol and Cheltenham show that such regimes favour controlling growth to create high quality residential environments for managerial workers, maintain high property prices and only seek to attract high-tech industries. Similarly, Stone (1993) found that some US regimes were growth orientated, which he describes as development regimes, while others, which he classes as middle class progressive regimes, are engaged in environmental protection, conservation and social welfare.

These differences in orientation are also raised by Goodwin (1998), who discusses the way that rural areas have been deeply affected by new ways of governing. Goodwin attempts to move research in rural studies away from who has power over whom, such as the landed gentry, to who has the power to act. He states that rural research needs to problematise the ways in which diverse social groupings come together to gain a capacity to act. This point is in line with Cochrane's (1993) argument that the increasing importance of policy networks that extend outside local government structures undermines traditional hierarchical patterns of organisation. Part of this change in the character of rural local government can be linked to rapid changes in the size and structure of rural populations; as well as to the local anatomy of dominant political and social control, which have undergone rapid re-organisation in many rural areas (Cloke, 1990). Illustrative of messages about rural government in the (relatively recent) past, in his study of Suffolk, Saunders and associates (1978) found that policies to conserve agricultural land and restrict low cost housing developments were explained by the local political dominance of farmers and landowners. Today, these farmer and landowner interests are said to have been replaced by 'Town Tories', such as lawyers and accountants with an interest in re-creating past images of the countryside as a rural idyll (McLaughlin, 1986), as well as having adapted to present day consumptive needs. Cloke (1990) argues that this new service class of 'Town Tories' has colonised many local institutions, including county councils, district councils and parish councils. An anti-urban culture, which has become linked to traditional Englishness (Bouquet & Winter, 1987), has led to local government institutions that are vehemently anti-development (Cloke, 1990). Woods (1998a) goes as far as indicating that one strategy of rural councils is to reposition themselves as pressure groups, through lobbying external actors including the national government on behalf of local environmental interests. This is a new role for rural local authorities, which for most of the 20th century have been accused of being backward looking in their political activism (Madgwick et al., 1973). A more complex picture than a simple take over of rural local politics by Town Tories is painted in Woods (1998b) study of elites in Somerset, where three different groupings of elites jostle for position. The traditional elite was linked through organisations, such as the National Farmers' Union and the Royal Bath and West Agricultural Society. Added to which,

traditional power structures were aided by official appointments, such as the Lord Lieutenant of the County retaining power through discursive means, such as filtering appointment candidates for other posts. The Town Tories do exist in Woods' picture, being linked by other kinds of networks, such as the town gala committee, the Masonic Lodge and the Rotary Club. Finally Woods identified a third grouping, which was mainly public sector employed and consisted of recent incomer Liberal Democrats. This third grouping had networks through the voluntary sector, including the Council for Voluntary Services and Friends of the Earth. In interviews this Liberal Democrat group contrasted their open network of contacts, which they held enabled them to consult and remain in touch with 'real' issues, to the secretive and exclusive structures of the two Conservative groups. These patterns of links for councillors were bourn out in the empirical work, certainly for the Labour and Liberal Democrat Councillors and MP who had active links with organisations such as Shelter, a local housing association, and Meals on Wheels

As for the idea that a regime comes to dominate a local political system, this comes with the recognition that there are a number of objectives such a regime could have. This arises because regimes have dissimilar objectives – some prioritising economic expansion in the classic growth machine mould (Molotch, 1976) while others favour policies that seek a more amenity-rich outcome (Clarke and Goetz, 1994). Whichever is the case, the notion of regime politics raises questions of accountability, as the pursuit of self-interest, of whatever kind, may be incompatible with the public interest or be at odds with those who are excluded from the network. As for Bedfordshire, if a growth machine is operating then you would expect local and regional construction companies to be tied in to a networking relationship with local governments. It might also be expected that local government is relatively sophisticated in its dealings with the private sector, successfully negotiating for mutually beneficial policy outcomes. Finally, depending on the orientation of the regime locally, you would probably expect local government to be more sympathetic to business interests and see new housing development as an opportunity for economic growth rather than a threat to their area. Alternatively, if local regimes have a stronger 'amenity' emphasis, it might well be that residential developers have difficulties in getting their proposals accepted,

and a much higher priority is given to environmental standards in housing construction and design.

But is there any evidence on the nature of the local political regimes in Bedfordshire? Here the academic literature is very limited. One important piece of work exploring the relationship between business interests and local government is the work of Blowers (1980, 1984). In his study of corporate power and the environment Blowers (1984) provides the closest scrutiny of the relationship between business interests and the local political scene. In his exploration of relationships between the London Brick Company and Bedfordshire County Council, Blowers shows that the Company was able to exert considerable pressure on the County Council's impositions of environmental standards through threats to relocate factories, and therefore employment, elsewhere. In addition Blowers indicates that the negotiating position of the County Council was made more difficult by the position of the national government, for if, as in the 1980s, the national government is inclined to be 'pro-development' then the options for the County Council are restricted. One reason for this is that the Secretary of State (at that time for the Environment), through regional offices, can call in planning applications, however small, to a public enquiry. Hence if companies have influence at the central government level, this provides them with a second line of defence if they fail to secure agreement for what they want at a local level. It should be noted here that the enquiry process can also be instigated by the applicant if s/he is dissatisfied with a local decision.

> The company secure in its external support, could afford to engage in the local conflict in the hopes of success, but in the knowledge that defeat would not be the end of the road. The fact that central government was likely, ultimately to favour the company raises questions about how significant the debate at the local level might prove in the long run. (Blowers, 1984 pX)

However, the picture that Blowers paints of the London Brick Company imposing its will on local government should not be generalised across other spheres of local policy making. Local authorities are often in competition with one another to attract economic activities circulating in the global economy. A crucial factor here has been the hyper-mobility of productive capital, communications technologies and forms of

consumption compared to the immobility of certain local business activities, local government, and local populations requiring service provision (Gibbs and Jonas, 2000). There are, however, important differences between the case of the London Brick Company and greenfield housing proposals. For one the threat of withholding investment, which commonly seems to be the most powerful weapon of businesses, is less relevant in the context of new house building, since community groups and local government representatives may be happy for a developer to withdraw an investment plan completely. This key difference between threats to withdraw job creating investment and the withdrawal of a housing proposal means that the investigation of house building is likely to expose new considerations in power relations between the local state and business interests in Bedfordshire.

Members and officers

In order to understand the engagement of local authorities with house building, it is not sufficient to restrict attention to relationships between central and local government, or linkages between business and the local state. Also important to understand are the driving forces within local institutions themselves. There are a number of potentially critical elements here, including the political disposition of locally elected officials and their relationship with professional officers on the council. On this second point much of the literature suggests that elected members are in a dependent relationship with their officers. Thus, Imrie and Raco (1999) argues that local government decision making is underpinned by an elite 'officer-corps' who, while technically accountable to councillors, did not need to justify their decisions to a wider polity. Similarly Fudge and associates (1981) found that, after six months in office, the majority of newly elected councillors in England felt that officers dominated decision making. This view is shared by Reade and associates (1982), who argued that, through their own shared ideologies, planners have considerable discretion and wield considerable power in local decision making. In contrast elected members have faired badly in the series of changes in central-local relations discussed earlier. One reason for this is Verhage and Needham (1997) argues, that local government occupies a weak position in comparison with business interests in

planning for housing, due to the limited means of exercising power they have in comparison with local government in other European countries. The planning authority cannot use private law because it does not play a direct role in the development of land, so cannot act as a landowner (in most instances). The only way the local authority can exercise power over private parties is by public law. The private parties depend on the local authority to grant planning permission. The reforms that have been instituted have sought to depoliticise the control of services and to increase the role of managers, users and the private sector. Perhaps not surprisingly in this context, Thomas (1995) argues that there is an increasing trend to delegate decision making to officers with little councillor input. Substantive policy decisions become reduced to technical or procedural matters, with primacy in decisions with officers, who can claim to be value neutral. However, this picture of an elite group of officers should be approached with some caution. The shapes and forms of elites are often fluid (Woods, 1998b). This dynamic nature of local elites comes from changes in power or influence from appointments or resignations, from changes in the importance of certain policy areas, as can occur with new directions from national government, or a change in local political control, which can see changes in the priority afforded to different issues.

There are a number of factors that place councillors in Britain in a dependent relationship with officers compared to most other European local governments. For one, British local government lacks a separate and identifiable political executive to provide a focus for public attention and leadership within a local area. The committee system that has dominated decision making in Britain in recent decades does not give rise to natural focal points. Recent moves to create a cabinet style of government and experiments with elected mayors might change this but cabinet government was only under discussion in the district councils investigated here at the end of the study period, while the possibility of an elected mayor was a political 'talking point' in Bedford alone. Indeed, while the logic of democratic institutions might suggest that politicians are mindful of the next election, responding to local demands of their electorate, especially in marginal constituencies, local issues do not seem to be important in voting in British local elections (Dunleavy, 1980) where voting is based

on national patterns rather than local issues. In addition to which there are fewer councillors per head of population that in most other European local government systems (Batley and Stoker, 1992), so councillors have larger wards and are less likely to know individual members of their electorate. Moreover, evidence from opinion surveys indicates that the public in general has slight knowledge of what local governments actually do. Rao and Young (1999) found that 86 % of the public can not attempt to name the leader of their local government and of those who tried only one third were right, so only 5% of people gave a correct answer. Perhaps indicative of this, local politicians in Britain face competition from national representatives, that is MPs, in being asked by people to take up complaints relating to local affairs. At one level, this can be seen as liberating for local politicians, as their actions appear to have few local electoral consequences. However, set against this is both the constraining influence of national government directives and the influence of their own officers. In the planning context, officers possess two key factors that give them a relatively powerful position. For one, the planning officers' power lies in their access to a wider range of information than other participants in a planning conflict. Secondly, compared with elected members, planners can devote much more of their time to a planning issue, as they do not need to devote time to another full time job, to canvassing and other party political activities.

It has long been recognised that bureaucrats have interests of their own. In this regard land use planning departments are no different from others. These departments possess a bureaucratic organisation similar to that of other local government policy arenas, such as education and the social services. Land use planning departments contain main features that are characteristic attributes of bureaucracies, such as a hierarchical organisation and the appointment of full time staff with specific skills. This contrasts them as organisations from the majority of environmental groups at the local level, as such groups do not possess bureaucratic structures or employ professional staff. But even if planning departments share certain common features, they can still be differentiated. One dimension along which this is possible is funding levels. Within Britain there are wide variations in the spending by local governments on planning services. Paddison (1983) drew this point out, when he examined

variability in spending on a range of services, including education, highways, health visits, libraries, parks and planning. What Paddison found was that planning as a service had the joint greatest variation in spending amongst local government services, with a standard deviation that was more than 50% of mean average expenditure per capita. Paddison's survey shows that while there was considerable consensus about how much public money should be spent on certain services, for example education, there was no such consensus over spending on planning. More recent research carried out by Morton (1997) suggests there is still strong financial independence of local government in determining how much of their income to allocate to planning departments. The degree of variation recorded here could simply be a result of some local authorities experiencing few controversial planning applications over an extended period. A more likely explanation is that many local authorities do not regard spending on planning as a priority area for funding.

The existence of such expenditure variability is worth grasping, as expectations derived from public choice theory suggests that a link exists between levels of bureau funding and the self-interest of bureaucracies (e.g. Niskanen, 1973). Stereotypes have cast public sector workers are knights, tireless servants of the public interest, or knaves, working in the public sector to secure personal political advantages (Le Grande, 2003). The 'knaves' view that is put forward in public choice theory, that government officials are driven by a desire to maximise their own self-interest. This leads to an expectation that local government bureaucrats seek greater control over resources and a greater capacity to manipulate elected representatives, so the political composition of the council makes little difference to policy implementation (a point that is not unrelated to the ideas of Pahl, 1975, on urban managerialism). Hence once established in an institution, planning is portrayed as conforming to the conservative character identified by Schattschneider (1960 p71) as typical of all organisations, namely that:

> All forms of organisations have a bias in favour of exploiting some forms of conflict and the suppression of others, because organisation is the mobilisation of bias.

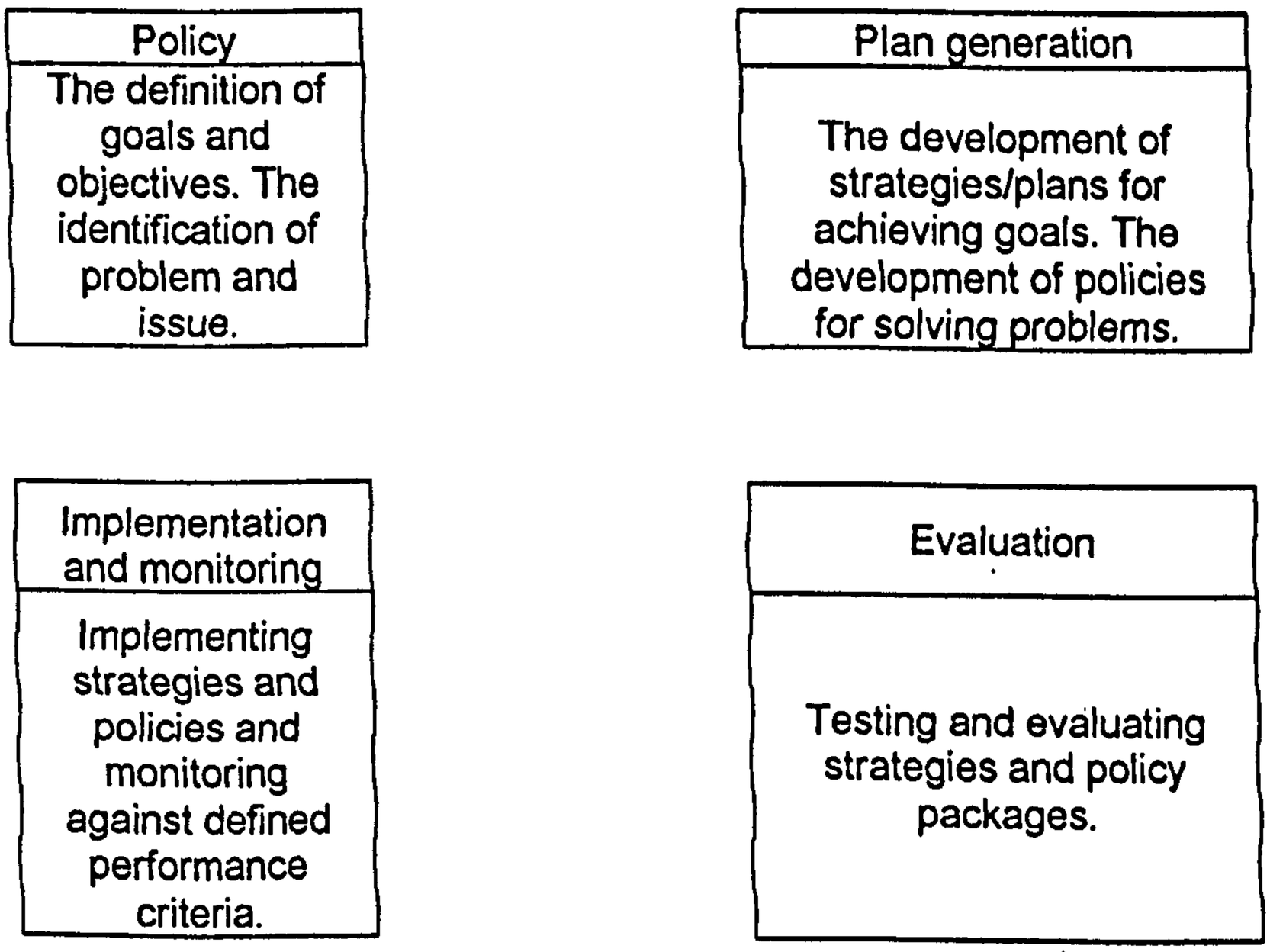
However, in public choice theory, the self-interest of bureaucracies is often seen narrowly, as being simply directed towards increasing in size of the bureau (given the expected impact on the power and salaries of senior officials from such growth; Boyne, 1987). But this claim is dubious for land use planning. For one, a large organisation is more likely to attract public scrutiny, with antagonism if the increased role of the planning department means more regulation, while elected officials are more prone to question the effectiveness of expensive departments. Moreover, as Dunleavy (1985) makes clear, factors other than bureau growth are valued by bureaucrats. Thus, Tewdwr- Jones and Allmendinger (1998) argue that planners can themselves be regarded equally as stakeholders in the land use planning process, given that they are eager to exercise personal planning ideologies that have been developed over years of planning education and training. Dunleavy (1985) also highlights other factors, including trust, work autonomy, respect for a profession and a predictable operation environment, which he sees as critical in the operations of bureaucrats. This last feature is particularly important for the research. This is because it raises the possibility that bureaucratic practices will seek to create environments in which they can safely predict outcomes when considering new housing proposals, hence favouring a land use planning system that is practical, incremental and conservative.

The land use planning system

As for the land use planning system itself, while the literature identifies the presence of a variety of forums in which governance structures find expression, the focus of this thesis is primarily on the formal structures of the land use planning system. A primary reason for this is that the actuality of house building requires application through the development control process, so the critical focus of the decision process lies within the formal structures of local planning departments. This does not mean that land use planning is not subject to outside influence. As regulation theory posits, the inherent contradictions of capitalism require that the detrimental consequences of capital accumulation are ameliorated and stabilised by particular modes of social regulation (Painter, 1991). Much of the theoretical and empirical work that has been undertaken on regulation theory has been directed at the nation state and plays limited

attention to environmental considerations with the notable exception of Milbourne and associates (2003). The land use planning system represents a key element at the local and regional levels of these regulatory enactments (Goodwin and Painter, 1996). Hence planning as an instrument is required to serve the need of capital accumulation, whilst at the same time legitimating processes of landscape change. Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (1998) describe the planning system as a means of negotiation between market choice (the desires of the individual) and political choice (the desires and actions of the state). Yet planning also separates land-related development, which is an issue for public discussion, from non-planning land- related profit. This has not always been the case and there have been various efforts by Labour Governments to introduce betterment taxes, each of which has been repealed by a succeeding Conservative administration (Rydin, 1993). The message here is that the basic tenets of the land use planning system are subject to change, although it is notable that change seems to occur as a cyclical process in which a new planning response is triggered by a crisis, in for example the environment or the economy. Yet there is often a time overlap in which policies put in place to deal with one crisis remain in place long after the features causing the initial crisis have changed.

Figure 7.1 Cyclical Process of Decision Making. After Groome (1993)



So what purpose does planning serve in a modern democracy? Academic opinion is not in agreement about its role, with some commentators like Faludi (1987) arguing that the role of planning is to facilitate a rational process of decision making and to enable decisions to be made. But for other commentators, including Freidmann (1987) and Healey (1997), the planning system is an arena for continual debate and argumentation between relevant interest groups, in this instance house builders and civic and environmental groups, rather than being solely the product of planning professionals and bureaucrats. Planning is about process, the way in which different stakeholders are involved, and about product, the kind of developments that are physically built. While some commentators have strongly promoted the importance of changes to the process to enable 'better' environmental decisions to be made (Healey, 1997), others, including Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (1998), have questioned this focus on process, arguing that 'successful' efforts on the part of local government to involve more people in policy processes quickly lead to stakeholders feeling aggrieved by the political and legal constraints that prevent the delivery of their wishes.

The interaction of environmental groups in planning is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six. For present purposes, what is significant is that the formal structures of the planning system have had a strong impact on the development of the environment movement. Thus, Lowe (1977) argues that local environmental groups have arisen in direct response to the planning system and to initiatives associated with the planning system to encourage public participation in planning, such as the Skeffington Report in the late 1960s (Committee on Public Participation in Planning, 1969). But if land use planning is contentious, it is so in policy terms, rather than in a legal sense. In contrast to other advanced economies, most notably the USA, the courts in Britain have traditionally had a very limited role to play in the arbitration of local planning matters. The courts have not seen it as their function to try to establish the proper relationship between the conditions that accompany a grant of planning permission and the projected impact of a proposed development (e.g. Tesco Stores PLC versus the Secretary of State 1985). In terms of the Town and Country Planning Act, the role

of the courts is largely limited to ensuring that planning authorities have made their decisions about planning applications in accordance with the procedures.

As McDonald (1989) describes it, this leaves planners with a range of options in delivering policy. These include command planning, which sets compulsory targets, as for household projections; policy planning which structures decision environments, corporate planning that uses processes of bargaining and negotiation, and participant planning that relies on voluntary compliance with preferences reached by group deliberation. In a comparison of planning policies for sustainable development internationally, Davison (1996) developed a similar typology to his list on how planning influences development which he describes as inspiration, commitment, guidance and control. Planning that is inspirational is well exemplified at one end of the planning spectrum by such as Ebenezer Howard's vision for a garden city or more recently Peter Hall and Ward (1998) modernising Howard's work to create new sociable cities. The ideas and language present in these documents are far removed from the style and content of formal planning documents such as local plans. At the other end there is control by statutory processes. Of course these planning styles can operate at the same time, as seen with command planning, where the central government and county councils have tried to impose housing targets on tiers of government below them, while at the same time the county council and a district council may be taking part in corporate planning over a particular site. As Hull (1997) has argued, command styles of planning, where local decisions about the allocation of land and development permits are tied to national projections, have had significant impacts on the way house planning decisions are made, with these impacts not found in other policy areas (other than mineral extraction, the subject of national targets at the time of her writing). The three most important impacts of this style of planning according to Hull are, first, that the range of substantive issues discussed has narrowed, second that more emphasis has been placed on policy outputs in terms of providing a flow of sites for development, and, third, that the resource costs for effective citizen participation have increased. As far as Hull (1997) is concerned, planning for housing shows the British planning system at its most centralised and inflexible.

It is important here to link issues discussed earlier on - central-local government relations, to the statutory planning system. There are a number of important features in this relationship that are relevant to this study. These have been highlighted by Pacione (1990). He draws out that the balance between coercion and advice from central government to local government varies widely, with the result that the status and purpose of many communications is unclear. This is despite the fact that communication tends to be a one-way process from the centre to local government. What causes difficulty here is that many circulars emphasise uniform national policies and ignore specific local circumstances that influence the effectiveness of policy implementation. The problems caused by Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs) in this regard is also highlighted by Tewdwr-Jones (1997), who argued that to avoid conflict with development interests and the central government many local plans were simply replicating the wording in PPGs in their policies. This left the more difficult talk of relating national policy to local circumstances entirely to officers involved in development control. The PPGs have also created an unwillingness according to Tewdwr-Jones to consider policy issues in planning documents that are not discussed in PPGs. Central government also tends to take an individual view of different services, instead of examining the interrelationship between different policies and programmes at the local level. As a consequence, links between (say) land use planning and local transport policies are not sufficiently well considered. Added to which, the central government is accused of involving itself needlessly in the detail of local government administration (Pacione, 1990). The end-product is a sense of inadequate communication between the centre and local government. Part of the reason for this is explained by Batley and Stoker (1992) as being due to a split between the career paths of those who work in the civil services and those employed by local government.

Taken together, the above factors result in planners and other local government officials having greatly reduced discretion and freedom to innovate, or, taking an extreme position, almost no innovative capacity at all. The local state could simply be seen as part of the central state's implementation network. This approach to local

government has been described by Batley and Stoker (1992) as an agency model. Under this interpretation of the local state, central-local relations are defined around compliance or non-compliance with national programmes. In this study, the question of central-local government power structures was raised with all interviewees. A key issue here was whether central government is acting, as much of the literature suggests, in a dictatorial way, stifling local innovative attempts by local government to deliver new locally distinctive solutions for environmentally sound housing? Moreover, it was important to identify how far, as Pacione (1990) suggests, central government was seen to view housing policy in isolation, or whether central government does perceive the links local government must make between housing, transport, air quality, biodiversity and other policy areas. Underlying these questions was a central concern with whether local planning agencies were seeking to promote more environmentally sound housing options. Alternatively, the option was that central government was not doing enough nationally to raise environmental standards, for example through building regulations, or providing appropriate direction for local authorities, for example by issuing design guides and best practice publications. How far enthusiasm for environmental considerations was promoted or dampened at the local level by central government actions was thereby taken on-board as a key issue for this study.

Local government and ecological modernisation

Planning has always been a multifaceted enterprise, which addresses social and economic needs as well as the physical arrangement of land and the built environment (Rushman, 2000). One of the initial purposes of the planning system was the redistribution of social and physical resources. This prescriptive response to enhance social welfare can be seen in the provision of more equitably planned environments, such as new towns and slum clearance. Healey and Shaw (1994) argue that since the inception of the land use planning system in the 1940s priorities have shifted from meeting local needs and welfare issues towards environmental concerns. But this does not mean that this tendency is universal. As a consequence, a key question for this study is how the environment is interpreted by those council representatives who regulated development and produced strategic plans during the 1990s. The importance

of the 1990s here arises because this was the decade that saw the emergence of sustainable development in local policy making. Perhaps the link between planning and sustainable development should be obvious. As a profession, planning is concerned with the future, with long term quality and survival, while attempting to incorporate into decision making a wide range of potential impacts and side effects, both on the human social system and on the external natural system on which society depends (Jepson, 2001). An important theme in much of the current literature on the environment and sustainable development is the need for local approaches to implementation and delivery. The reasoning for preferencing the local is often somewhat circular, referring to the importance placed on local action in the UN Agenda 21 Programme and the EU Fifth Environmental Action Programme (Gibbs and Jonas, 2000). However, some commentators on ecological modernisation see a more marginal role for local government and for local initiatives, particularly work by Spaargaren and Mol (1992). While only one piece of research (Jackson and Roberts, 1999) has been identified which assesses the acceptance of ecological modernisation in local government in the UK, a number of papers have addressed the environmental values held by local government planning departments (Whatmore & Boucher, 1993; Healey & Shaw, 1994; Bruff & Wood, 1995; Rydin, 1995; Counsell, 1998; Gibbs et al., 1996). Jackson and Roberts examine the response of various local actors to a European Structural Funds programme in Eastern Scotland. Jackson and Roberts identify, as this research does, the strong ecological modernisation rhetoric in EU policy documents. However, they find this lacking the spatial plan developed locally. Heavy involvement by Scottish Natural Heritage resulted in a strong focus on rural issues ignoring problems affecting industrial communities. It also makes almost no effort to consider energy efficiency issues in the programme. Thus, Whatmore and Boucher (1993) argue that planning discourse has been dominated by an environmental narrative centred on a tension between 'development' and 'conservation'. They argue that a conservation narrative was dominant in the consideration of environmental issues until the 1980s within UK planning discourse. This conservation discourse centred on a regulatory, state-led system of zoning and formal plan making. This places development in opposition to conservation through a number of mechanisms, including the spatial segregation of urban and rural land uses,

natural and built environments and the designation of discrete conservation sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). This conservation versus development split changed in 1994 when the UK national government published *Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy* (HMSO, 1994). In this document the land use planning system is considered by central government as one of the main arenas which is essential for implementing the national strategy for sustainable development. It also attempted to place development and conservation in a less oppositional relationship. This focus on the local as a key site for delivering environmental policy has been welcomed by local authorities (Marvin & Guy, 1997). One reason for this is that it represented an alternative to the Conservative Government's view of minimal local government and provided a re-legitimation of local government activity. Accompanying this 'revival' of local government activity, local authorities received substantial guidance in the early 1990s on how to shape the local plans they were to develop from 1995 onwards. This included the publication of the Countryside Commission's *Conservation Issues in Strategic Plans* (1994) and English Nature's (1994) *Planning for Environmental Sustainability.* In addition to guidance from statutory agencies, the Local Government Management Board produced (1993) *A Framework for Local Sustainability* and NGOs like the CPRE produced its1993 *Sense and Sustainability: Land Use Planning and Environmentally Sustainable Development.*

The academic literature suggests that this plethora of advice directed at local government concerning the environment and the planning system only sporadically informed its target audience. Bruff and Wood (1995) and Winter (1994), for example, point to the way local authorities accept different issues associated with sustainable development to varying degrees. Winter researched 70 new local development plans, which he studied to see whether they referred to the 10 sustainability criteria in PPG12. Fifteen of the local authorities did not refer to any of the sustainability criteria and the highest score was eight. Winter concluded that new development plans were only paying lip service to sustainable development and that there is little evidence of substance in the policies themselves. In analysing local development plans, Bruff and Wood found that policies that would advance sustainable development were strongest in traditional policy areas, such as the built environment, transport and the natural

environment. In contrast, policies to protect natural resources or to promote the conservation of energy and generation of renewable energy represented significant gaps in local authority plan making. According to Bruff and Wood (1995), local government seemed better adapted to developing policies that protected an existing resource, such as green spaces or local shopping facilities, than in formulating policies that required more promotional initiatives. They conclude that local authorities are better at controlling 'development' towards sustainable development than in promoting 'development' towards it. This bias towards protecting existing assets can lead to local government being closely aligned in policy terms to amenity groups. An illustrative study that brings this out is Carmona's (1998) examination of responses by a range of groups, including professional bodies representing planners (the Royal Town Planning Institute, the District Planning Officers' Society and the Association of Conservation Officers), developers and amenity groups to a central government consultation about design in the built and natural environment. He found that the planning professional's position had much in common with the amenity lobby, with professional bodies arguing for better guidance from government on landscape design at the macro and micro scales, while stressing the relationship between conservation and sustainable development in the built environment.

However, the relationship between conservation and sustainable development as environmental guiding principles in the planning system is not straightforward. Healey and Shaw (1994) make this clear when they point out that one challenge for structure plans and local plans is to select from and adjust to what is often a competition between discourses. They explore the way that 'the environment' was understood from the 1940s to the 1990s in development plans and suggest five strands can be identified:

1. A welfarist- utilitarianism, combined with a moral landscape aesthetic – which was found from the 1940s onwards
2. Growth management, servicing and containing growth while conserving open land – from the 1960s onwards
3. Active environmental care and management – from the 1970s onwards

4. A marketised utilitarianism, combined with conservation of nationally important heritage – from the 1980s onwards
5. Sustainable development from the 1990s.

These strands do not neatly succeed each other, but co-exist, with older ideas persisting as newer strands are bought into play. For example, in the 1980s there was a power struggle centred around proposals to slacken green belt restraint and make proposals for 'new country towns'. This created conflict between conservation and the extension of free-market ideology into the land development process, as represented by the strands of a marketised utilitarianism discourse and earlier preservationist concerns. For Owens (1994) the core of the debate is about the meaning of sustainable development, with the terminology of balance and trade-off competing with that of limits, constraints and demand management.

Some commentators are sceptical about the degree to which the planning system can incorporate environmental concerns in a substantive way. Burnheim (1995), for example, describes how ecological concerns fare badly in local political processes, due to a system of power trading, which involves 'selling' ones support in matters over which a local government decisions makers is relatively indifferent in order to secure support in return in another decision context. Vote-trading is the most obvious example, but there are other ways of exercising such exchanges. Hence, the environment and the welfare of future generations can be traded against other political issues, which are often unrelated to the decision at hand. Whatmore and Boucher(1993) go further by arguing that planning practice has always been concerned with the notion of development. As such nature has tended to be regarded by planners as a commodity, and generally one that should be developed to realise its productive value and service potential to the public. They states that:

> Land-use planning formalises the separation between nature and abstract space through the written codes of legal statute and professional conduct which impose a site based rather than a system based, narrative structure on its treatment of the environment. This narrative structure reinforces an atomistic interpretation of the environment, associated with the ideology of private property rights, nature is strategically represented as a series of discrete parcels and elements, rather than in integrative system of relationships" (Whatmore and Boucher, 1993, p169)

Similarly Jepson (2003), in a study carried out in the USA of planners' attitudes to and practice toward sustainable development, found that the character of their areas affected their behaviour. Those in declining urban and in most rural local government units showed more regard to sustainable development than those in rapidly growing areas. In growth areas where markets were strong, planners wanted to work with market forces and environmental considerations were given a lower priority. These perspectives of planning and environmental considerations, particularly Jepson's, strongly contradict the central features of ecological modernisation, where a strong and competitive economy and preservation for the environment are linked.

The empirical work now addresses some of the key questions for the research. The empirical work draws heavily on material from semi-structured interviews but also on reporting in the local media and policy documents produced by local government. The body of academic literature on local government identifies a number of both complementary and competing trends: an increase in central government control over local government; a withdrawal of local government from direct service provision; a more business orientated local government which enters into partnerships with commercial interests and a move for local government to reposition itself as a pressure group, resisting development. What evidence is there from Bedfordshire about the shifts in the role of local government identified in the literature? Secondly, what is the relationship between members and officers in Bedfordshire? The literature strongly suggest a dominant role for officers and the emergence of a small group of members and officers into an elite. An elite structure could reduce sources of environmental influence on decision making by precluding ward councillors from adding their local knowledge and more junior officers in nature conservation or Agenda 21 posts from having an input as well. It is also important to consider how important housing is as a policy issue for local government. If housing is a minor consideration for local government, local government may be successfully applying pressure to raise environmental standards among businesses, but gravel companies or industrial developments rather than house builders. The literature also suggests a central role for the planning system as the key way local government tries to influence developer's decisions. The empirical work will examine the relationship between

business interests and local government and focus on the success of local government in influencing developer's actions. Finally the empirical work will consider whether local government accepts ecological modernisation. If they do not accept the central tenets of ecological modernisation they will be unable to apply pressure to builders to raise standards. So, firstly, to consider the strength of local government and central/ local relations.

The changing central/ local government relations and a new rõle for the local state?

In Bedfordshire, there was an almost universal degree of consensus among interviewees from local government, environmental groups and third parties about the significant role of central government intervention and the weakness of local government in determining local policy directions. Local government and central government did not share common policy objectives in relation to housing. These sentiments are well illustrated in the following quote from a former chair of a district council planning committee:

> I think that the government has got, a) I think they have got their figures wrong, I don't think they're going to need all these extra houses, b) I think they've been lobbied intensively by industry who want to set up the south east as a hot spot region to match the European regions and c) if they're really serious, and keep telling us that all these single people need house, what are they doing allowing house builders to build 4 and 5 bed roomed houses? Which are sometimes occupied by single people.

Attempts by local government to follow a different policy course from the priorities of central government were frequently overruled by government appointed planning inspectors at public enquiries. A long serving journalist in the Bedfordshire press exemplified the sentiments felt by many of the interviewees:

> I think that a planning decision made locally should be a planning decision made locally. There shouldn't be planning by appeal. Because the home secretary with the best of intentions or the planning inspector with the best of intentions aren't going to get the full picture. If something is turned down by a local council for a valid reason, then I don't think somebody else, somebody from outside and unelected by those people for that function, should be able to turn round and well actually no we are going to overturn it. And I think that is a view that would be echoed by virtually every councillor you would come across and most of the planning department.

Despite these strongly held views about intervention, interviewees showed different degrees of understanding of the processes by which central government over-ruled local decision making. The passage below is from an interview with an official in a village society that had a strong grasp of the planning system. This commentary outlines the way in which the village society tries to strengthen the resolve of local governments toward turning down planning applications:

> Interviewee: ... but they are constrained by looking over their shoulder at government enquiries. They are obsessed with the idea that they will be challenged at an enquiry where people would object.
> AC: Yes.
> Interviewee: They are quite open about it. They will actually say they don't want to make this decision because they feel they might lose at an appeal. So then the Society actually starts to trawl opinions in the past, we need to see where councils have successfully upheld their decisions at enquiries. You present that to the council, and say look, you have very little risk at losing the enquiry because we have found that this, this, this, this situation, Hertfordshire had this and somewhere had Berkshire. It's very difficult to get them out of this idea that [laughter] they are always very worried about losing an enquiry
> AC: Is that both the officers and the members?
> Interviewee: Yes, in fact I can tell you of one decision here, was disgracefully moved by the council [CHAIR] of the committee because they were braving me to believe that they might press a surcharge if they came to a decision and I was amazed that first of all they could be so easily persuaded, because if you actually look at all historical circumstances very few councils have ever been surcharged.

Similarly another village society, which focused its attention on planning, particularly housing development, was particularly critical of the role of government inspectors at planning enquiries:

> It makes the Borough wary at times as to whether they should turn it down because they know they could be facing going to the inspector..... time and expense. And why some of these inspectors go against clear policies of the Borough - e.g. contain the expansion of villages and stop developments in protected areas..... These circulars give the broad drift of government policy and so on. They [planning inspectors] are aware of, and they are well equipped with knowledge to government policy in all its aspects, yet when they look at a planning problem, they do not seem to apply it very often. And it drives the local planning officers and local authorities mad because it is becoming in the words of one planning officer to me a couple of months ago a 'complete lottery'. The inspectors are becoming very individual and not being guided in their judgement by what is government policy. Whereas the local authority have to be guided by government policy and when why work to the PPGs and so on.

While this was the only interviewee to claim that the mechanisms put in place by central government to ensure local compliance with national policy could be having the opposite effect, the tone of this criticism is not out of line with the general sense of despair over local authorities not being prepared to resist new development proposals. A widespread view among interviewees was that central government was not directing local government towards the development of integrated policies. For example pressure from central government in increasing the housing allocations in Bedfordshire does not appear to be integrated with another central government aim of reducing traffic growth according to local politicians:

> [County councillor Richard Payne] said: 'This is a recipe for disaster and could have a severe impact on our infrastructure, particularly in terms of road congestion. The new figures from the government, while an improvement on the original recommendations put forward by their advisors, still fail to address the issue of capacity in rural shires such as Bedfordshire.' (*Times and Citizen* 10 March 2000.)

This view accords with the literature, where central government does not understand the links local government must make between different policy areas, in this case housing and transport and also does not understand the particular local circumstances which could make a national response to a policy issue inappropriate.

This does not mean that there was not some sympathy with aspects of the local government position among the interviewees. Illustrative of this was the general pattern of concern over the nature of central government interventions. Illustrative of sentiments that were expressed in this context, a paid employee of an environmental group, who spent approximately half her time on planning issues, highlighted the competing policy objectives that central government placed on local government:

> They [district councils] must have so many conflicting policies to conform to. I don't know whether it restricts them in any way but it most probably influences their decisions. Because they have to meet all these targets and Best Value and all the rest of it and with limited resources for many of them.

A very similar point was raised by a long serving regional government official:

> The sheer volume of mail and advice coming in to an individual planning authority is so great, that you can't read it.

It is not simply legal structures, such as public enquiries and the threat of surcharging, that shapes central-local relations but also the role of guidance notes and assessment processes, including Best Value. This picture of local government being weighed down by excessive guidance and regulation could have a significant role in inhibiting the development of ecological modernisation at a local level. If local government is overwhelmed in simply reading so much material from central government this will not give them time to translate these measures into a local context, formulate local policy priorities or keep abreast of developments in environmental policy making coming from other sources such as material from research institutes, professional bodies and NGOs. Detailed, and at times seemingly unconnected, central government directives also suggest an approach to environmental decision making that is firmly based in the 1970s and early 1980s, in a pre-ecological modernisation tradition where environmental policy making was based on large amounts of regulation rather than negotiation and 'win-win' scenarios.

Contributing to the sense of local (relative) powerlessness is a sense of lack of leadership from the wealthiest local government organisation, the County Council, which not only has responsibility for strategic planning proposals in the county (albeit subject to central government overview and approval) but also has the largest staff of professional officers who have the expertise to address environment-housing interactions. While only about half of local government interviewees commented at length on local government reform, the messages they provided offer a clear sense of 'loss'. One element of this loss was the creation of unitary local authorities in the late 1990s, which resulted in Luton Borough being taken out of Bedfordshire County

Footnote: Best Value was introduced by the Labour government to replace a previous emphasis on compulsory competitive tendering in public sector service delivery. It aims to promote the of continuous improvement of local government management and business practice. Like other government auditing and inspection processes in the public sector it requires significant staff time to prepare for the best value audit.

Council to form its own, one-tier local government area. As one council officer who had worked in Bedfordshire local government for nearly 20 years saw the situation:

> I think the County have shrunk dramatically as a force since the local government re-organisation. Partly I think politically they are very much in favour of small government if you like, so what at one time seemed a very large and patronising kind of County Council has rather retreated from that sort of perception of them and they have got rid of a lot of their land and leased it off to the National Trust and all sorts of things like that.

Similarly an interview with one of the moderate NGOs expressed concern that the county council was shedding responsibility for recreation in the countryside.

> The whole structure of countryside recreation in Bedfordshire is falling apart, since the County Council have gone into reverse. Because they're getting rid of their country parks, um because the County Council want to shed responsibility. They say that it wasn't about cost cutting but it is. The whole structure of countryside recreation at the moment in Bedfordshire has gone backwards.

Sometimes these efforts by the county council to rid itself of land holdings and strengthen its less secure financial position resulted in land being allocated for housing. Media coverage and an interview with a Mid Bedfordshire councillor highlighted the case of Stotfold where the County Council planned to sell a meadow on the edge of the village for the development of 50 houses:

> there is a case being fought just now at Stotfold, I think a development of about 50 houses where which is sitting of what's been a meadow land you know, its, now people are very unhappy about that and they're fighting that, they consider it would be much more appropriate for it to be left as open space for residents. But of course it's the county that own the land.

This sense of local (government as institution) leadership having been diminished was a sentiment that was seen to have broader implications than a loss of morale, following the creation of the new Luton Borough. Also recognised as a potent force was the manner in which local government as a whole had shrunk as a directing local force over the last few decades. As a long serving councillor and former chair of a district council planning committee expressed this, in the context of the County Council:

> Now the County Council had just about run itself into the ground, and privatised just about everything its got.

This again picks up the common message that the County Council has declined significantly as a major political force in Bedfordshire. Similarly an interview with a county councillor of 28 years highlighted the declining role of the County Council caused by central government reforms.

> I mean one of the reasons I gave up county council was that you know there isn't really much point to a large extent as I see it that the local democracy has really been dealt some absolutely fatal blows by both governments.

For interviewees, this was seen to limit the ability of the County Council to influence both developers and the policies of district councils. There was also clear evidence that the County Council was not a powerful enough political forces to resist central government intervention in strategic planning matters. Bedfordshire County councillors initially resisted the housing allocation for their plan area but later carried out a complete change of policy:

> Council U-turn over houses quota. Councillors have buckled under pressure from Environment Secretary John Gummer, and recently agreed increase the number of houses to be built in the county by the year 2011. Members of the County Council environment committee have unwillingly accepted orders by the government to include 49,300 new houses in the structure plan – 2,100 more than the committee had originally planned.... Mr Gummer issued a direction on the 4th of October preventing the council from adopting the structure plan until it was modified to his satisfaction. (*Times and Citizen* 7 November 1996.)

When the builders commented on the institutional capacity of local government they focused their attentions on Mid Bedfordshire. They consistently argued that as a small and fairly rural local authority it experienced difficulty in planning for larger housing developments. These sentiments are reflected in the views of a medium sized regional company who focused on larger, more expensive properties.

> I can understand why Mid Beds are the way they are because it is very much a rural local authority and there is limited major development going on as you would expect...Mid Beds are a lot more standards based. Sort of going round with a tape and a scale rule and talking about back to back distances and garden sizes and so on, which to my mind is not good planning. I don't think the standards in that respect actually prove anything. I think they are a tool for fashioning layouts which become over engineered.

A lack of skill and experience in dealing with larger planning application is also confirmed in the local media reporting:

> Mid Beds District Council is also criticised in the inspectors report, because the proposals extend far beyond the terms of the adopted planning brief, which mentions 200 homes. It states 'It seems to me that the council's approach is deeply flawed. Contrary to the principle that the brief should regulate the development, the development proposals are obviously driving the brief. (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 19th March 1999)

The issue of institutional capacity in land use planning departments, particularly Mid Bedfordshire and the County Council, questions their ability to pressure builders to higher standards.

This perceived loss was not the only one that was viewed as a core failing in local government efforts to engage with major policy issues. Also of note was the view that there was a democratic deficit in local government, which further contributed to the weakness of local authorities as policy instruments. The following quote from a small wildlife group captures one sentiment that came across regularly:

> They [the district council] are scared stiff of upsetting anybody for fear they would lose....For goodness sake the turnout here in local elections is er you know just abysmal. It was about twenty percent in the last election. They are only getting a few votes. They don't dare to lose the very few votes they are getting.

The representativeness and skill of local councillors was also questioned. Illustrative of the tone here is the quote below, which comes from a small local developer who was involved in wider civic activity in the locality. Here he is commenting on the understanding of local councillors of the issues in housing development:

> I mean you want a complete spectrum of people, you want the farm labourers, you want the farmers, you want the people who go off to London every day, you want the cross section. But most of them don't really appreciate what the planning problems are. And they certainly wouldn't know anything about strategic planning even if they were...

While the first part of this comment represents something of an idealised view of local government composition, the question of the quality of local government representatives and the degree to which they represent society as a whole is a significant one.

The view that Bedfordshire has weak local government, which is unable to make its own decisions, was challenged by a number of groups around Bedford that opposed major housing developments on the flood plain. These groups saw housing developments and associated road schemes as being driven forward by local governments. These opponents to new housing developments did not perceive a central role for either national or regional government in these development proposals:

> They are not constrained in what they want to happen. The only thing that would constrain it [housing development] is if, for example, we put a stop to this or the Environment Agency said you can't built X houses here because of flooding. Then they would obviously be constrained but there is no automatic constraint.

But this was not the view of planning officers. They were more inclined to hold to a pragmatic view of local government intervention in housing development proposals. Take, for example, the following views of a senior planning officer in a district council:

> Interviewee: Clearly if you changed planning legislation, instead of it saying you should negotiate for a certain amount of affordable housing, if you change the legislation to say that all developments will provide 25% affordable housing, you'd be laughing. There would be not need to negotiate it. If you changed planning law then obviously it would be easier but I don't think that's what you're asking.
> AC: Up to a point but also where you feel you can't negotiate too hard in case they just go to appeal?
> Interviewee: But that's always the case isn't it. You have to negotiate within the context of what's reasonable.

Embedded within this commentary is the message that planning officers do not resent the external interference of central government in the same way as the majority of interviewees from environmental NGOs and other third parties. While the officer in this case could accept individual sections of planning guidance could be amended to make the planning officer's task easier, the idea that there were inherent problems with a developer's right to a planning appeal, and the lack of local discretion that results from the central government's system of issuing directives through PPGs, were taken as a *fait a compli*. Couched within the 'reality' of this situation, planning

officers were conscious that central government interventions through PPGs and the like brought both positive and negative consequences for them.

The two interviewees to view central government intervention as largely positive were an MP and a recently graduated district planning officer. Hence, one of the MP interviewees felt that the best way to improve energy efficiency in buildings was action by central government by, for example, changing the building regulations or amending advice to local authorities to give those issues a higher priority. The district council officer gave a number of specific examples where improved guidance from central government could improve environmental standards:

> Something that would be useful, in, possibly in relation to PPG 1, would be to have more sustainability checklists of criteria, at least included as general principles, and we could have more sort of information on sustainability, environmental aspects, doing this checklist and as a county we don't quite know what to hang it on. If there was guidance say in sustainability criteria, some supplementary planning guidance documents should be produced or whatever, or you know, district councils or should make clear the environmental criteria of their local requirements of housing developments, then obviously it would be easier for us to expand under conditions on all sorts of things.

The County Council was under its own initiative, producing a sustainability checklist in co-operation with the districts. This interviewee argued that such a document would have more substance if government policy encouraged its production. Only one of the NGO interviewees, from a moderate group with paid staff, viewed intervention in local government affairs by higher tiers of government as beneficial but cited European level intervention as beneficial rather than national government.

> I suppose in many ways it means that more strategically important things are likely to be protected. I mean if you were just dealing with everything at a very local level you would find that SSSIs at a local level wouldn't be tremendously...you can't imagine a discussion in a pub in a village of an evening is going to be about the intricacies of the protection of herb rich meadows, which wouldn't interest them one iota, so I mean its important that we get that strategic view, that if you like is imposed on us I mean it's a bit like everybody saying Europe are a load of interfering old busy bodies, but I mean we wouldn't have anything like the environmental protection that we have got at the moment if it wasn't for European Directives. I mean we seem to have been dragged screaming into the 21st Century as far as environmental protection is concerned. But I don't know whether they, I suppose they would say we would be capable of doing this on our own without all these directives

> coming through. I think the officers, they do need that strategic viewpoint coming through don't they? I mean they must have it otherwise they you know, they would take recommendations on the councillors would just say 'we want a new playground for the kids, we want a new CCTV, we want lighting and'..

So according to this need to protect the environment there is a need to go beyond the local and take a wider view when concerned with protecting the environment. Only the non-departmental public bodies, working at a regional level, really showed an awareness of the complexities of central/local relations:

> I remember as a student doing a project on PPGs, are they too prescriptive. Certainly from [this organisation's perspective] which has just been given a piece of legislation on flood risk they are great, but from a local authority perspective, for example [a local authority] who are desperate to try and regenerate the whole area why are restricted because it says you can't build behind flood defences which don't defend.

The solution to the central-local dilemma for this interviewee was a greater role for regional government which could be more sensitive to local conditions but was still able to take a wider perspective than the immediate interests of a specific district. In conclusion, while individual pieces of government guidance may raise the profile of individual environmental issues the appeal system has created a local government wary of going beyond the statutory minimum in environmental planning.

The other key issue to emerge from the literature was a shift from government to governance. Evidence for this at the local level in Bedfordshire was very sporadic. The limited evidence suggested new partners that local government engaged with focused more on the voluntary sector including environmental NGOs that the private sector. Those groups most involved in 'partnerships' or fulfilling functions previously carried out by the local government were the three countryside management project environmental groups. One of the groups commented

> I mean you look at our area on the map. I mean people say to me how the bloody hell do you manage to keep five people occupied in one piddling little area of Bedfordshire. There are just so many things you can get involved in, particularly I think, see we are increasingly being asked to do things by the local authority, that's, I mean we are just, we are taking over [name of] Country Park and taking over the rangers, but we are taking over a broader role, ranger service for the local authority and we are asked to do things by the

> planning departments, to look at particular sites because we have an expertise in that area.

The countryside management projects were the most involved but others were also involved in this changed relationship with local government. Several of the environmental NGOs pointed to the success of Dunstable Town Forum, which had been running for over 10 years, in involving local business, NGOs and the district council in partnership in improving the local environment in the town, particularly the town centre. The Town Forum was particularly concerned with the way in which very high volumes of traffic created an unpleasant shopping environment in the high street. Here issues of poor environmental quality from high levels of traffic are linked to a decline in the economic prosperity of the town as it becomes dominated by charity shops and discount stores. This 'tatty' appearance of the town centres is raised later in Chapter Eight in relation to building in high quality residential environments. This Forum's successes included modest environmental measures including the provision of secure cycle parking. Interviewees also mentioned the more recent forum established by the County Council to address the issue of environmental problems at Luton airport. This seemed to have a broader membership according to one of the village societies who attended and included groups like the Women's Institute, allotment holders and the history society. An interviewee from one of the countryside projects also pointed to the success of work with gravel extraction companies to achieve environmental gains in the Leighton Buzzard area. A stakeholder group had been set up which included civic groups, the gravel company the district council and was chaired by the Greensands Trust, a moderate NGO. The forum was keen to promote a 'win-win' opportunity for two unused gravel pits near Leighton Buzzard. Original planning permission required the company to deposit inert waste to restore the land surface to ground level and cover with grass. Instead the company wished to negotiate a new deal which would allow a reputable recycling facility to be developed on one site and return the other to a high quality wetland area that could be used for nature conservation and recreation. The following quote is taken from a Greensands Trust spokesperson describing the initiative.

> We are involved in quite a lot of planning matters in the Sandpit Strategy that we've been involved with around Leighton Buzzard. I mean there's a huge amount of abstraction of sand around Leighton Buzzard....you look at a map

> and we're talking about a significant proportion of the area surrounding quite a large town. We act with restoration plans, its actually trying to work at an earlier stage and influence them so that you can hopefully support them. So what we are trying to do is actually working with them in trying to persuade local people and the local Preservation Society and the Council that actually this application is not something we should reject....its got two lovely lakes that could be developed at the bottom. Its actually quite nice habitat...".

It is interesting to note that sand and gravel extraction, once considered a far more environmentally unwanted land use that new housing development, is managing to work with environmental groups and local government to achieve 'win-win' outcomes. In terms of new forms of governance developing around housing issues evidence is much more patchy still. None of the interviewees was able to identify any instance where there had been any kind of forum develop that had a interest in housing and perhaps wider environmental issues. None of the developers had attended such a forum and some questioned whether it would be seen as being inappropriate. This relationship between councillors and housebuilders is discussed in detail later in the chapter.

Member/officers

So if the relationship between central and local government creates problems for the raising of environmental standards in new build, what of the relationship between members and officers. The interviewees who had been actively involved in Bedfordshire politics for long periods of time, into the 1970s, were able to see long term shifts in these power balances.

> I've watched planning over the last 20 years, increasing professionalisation of planning officers, there were people who drifted into it from other professions after the war and now are sort of trained in the job than when they first started. It's become a much more academic discipline, I mean there is more common ground.

Bedfordshire is subject to the same long term trends that affect the rest of the country including the increased professionaisation and specialisation of planning officers highlighted by this interviewee. The balance of power between officers and members is important because, if the members are not giving sufficient scrutiny to officers' decisions, there will be a lack of democratic input into the land use planning process. Conversely, if council members routinely overturn officers decisions, this shows a

lack of trust in officers' decision making abilities. A local government where strong divisions exist can not be an effective lobbying force. This point was raised by a small number of interviewees, being expressed most clearly by an officer at the regional government level:

> To give you an idea of the spread, one local authority I worked with somewhere in the region of one recommendation in 400 was overturned by members, so 400 recommendations by officers so one of those would be overturned. Another authority that I worked in roughly 15% of recommendations were overturned by members and certainly in the former case that suggested a degree of passivity in numbers members that was perhaps undemocratic in the other one. It suggested to me a complete breakdown in relationships, lack of understanding by members of policy, lack of understanding by officers of members' political aspirations.

Putting this comment in context, none of the interviewees felt that decision making was strongly directed by elected council members in Bedfordshire. One interviewee, a long serving county councillor argued that in the past Bedford had a strong group of members who controlled decision making at the council, but that their power had been eroded, in part by reforms to local government:

> Bedford Borough did have a problem where they had a very strong sort of controlling group, and a strong core in that controlling group, they were very active, like some of the old style northern towns, where it was very sort of, not the mayor, but the leader and one or two others that really pushed forward the agenda. That's gone a bit now, I think with the changes that have been more recently that's probably less of a problem, I mean some of the decision making, the modern agenda in local government.

A small number of interviewees were unwilling to respond to this question because they felt too far removed from the local government to form a clear view on this issue, with this restraint being characteristic of some house builders and some of the smaller civic and environmental groups. A few interviewees also felt that there was a reasonable balance of power between officers and members. But the overwhelming majority of interviewees who felt able to address the issue of the relative contribution of officers and elected councillors held that decision making was officer-led or strongly officer-led. The following quote from an MP about a district council is very characteristic of the tone of the messages received:

> I think its very much officer led....it's very much dominated by them. It's a hung council in terms of party political control and therefore there is always

> the opportunity for officers to have more say. Sometimes inevitably, but it's been hung for so long, you know I would have thought people could have found out ways of working.

Similarly another MP related the concerns of going against officer wishes to the issue raised in the last section of surcharging:

> My sense is these days, both in Mid Beds and Beds Borough there is a deference to the view of officers. Officers who come along and say 'unless you do this you are liable to be in serious difficulties'. My sense is, from having spoken to councillors, is that they think officers are more persuasive than they were in the past....But the issue of surcharge crops up. People are afraid of their position, afraid of going against planning officers.

This suggests a local government where the power balances have changed over time and officers have more power over members. Other interviewees made the point even more strongly, as exemplified in this quote from a journalist about Bedford Borough:

> I think the reality is in fact that members amongst their groups are so confused, and so busy fighting each other, that I think the officers could change night to day. And as long as nobody got a lot of shitty letters about it before it before the meeting. They are all so taken up with the politics of it all that I think it does fall to the officers a lot more than it realistically should.

There did seem to be some variation between the districts. But as expressed by a different journalist, here discussing Bedford Borough and Mid Bedfordshire, even when there are differences these are not that stark:

> I would say it's officers [in Bedford Borough], by and large. I think the councillors would very much disagree with it, but they do tend to get led by their officers' advice a great deal... On a lot of councils, and I have seen this in Mid Beds quite a lot, the councillors will go against their officers advice at the first meeting, but there is always the rumble or the threat of an appeal and they will back down. They always go with the officers' judgement.

But the words of one long standing local government officer, speaking generally about all the district councils in Bedfordshire, cautioned that the seeming absence of councillor input only applied if councillors were viewed as a whole. Seen more in terms of the apex of the councillor power structure, there was more balance between the two groups:

> I think that the decisions or the constructs that enables the decisions to be taken emanates from a small group of elected members and very senior planning officers...if the two elements of that group are very much alike, then nobody else or any other interest is going to get a look in, whether that is elected member pressure or officers responding to that.

Very similar views were expressed by a Friends of the Earth Interviewee.

> AC: Do you think the decision making in the local authority is dominated by the officers or the members.
>
> Interviewee: Never the full council. Chairs of committees will meet with the officers. And the deal will be done. Then it will be taken to the committees who will just do what they are told. I don't think the full council are even told what to do they just sit there and when everybody puts up orange cards they put up orange cards. No it's the decisions and deals are all done by the chairs and the officers.

While it is difficult to draw firm conclusions from the evidence gathered, this explanation of senior groups of officers and councillors dominating decision making does coincide with messages that were gained from further probing of interviewees. The local media coverage also seems to support the view that policy making is developed by a small elite. While the local media frequently approach the ward councillor for a quote the names of a few key councillors crop up time and again from Mid Bedfordshire, South Bedfordshire and Bedfordshire County Council. This trend is most striking with the county council where almost all of the quotes are from either the offices who is head of environment and planning (this post holder changed early in the study period) or the councillor who chairs the environment and planning committee. Certainly, such an account does provide a compelling explanation for decision making in Bedfordshire districts and the County Council, perhaps with the exception of Bedford Borough, where the political elite is so unstable that it appears unable to form a working relationship with its officers. This view of decision making suggests an elitist form of decision making at a local level, which perhaps limits the number of routes through which environmental concerns can be incorporated into the decision making process. But if they do come to be accepted by the small powerful group that 'controls' a local council, this should enable environmental concerns to penetrate broadly and deeply into local policy enactments. The evidence for the acceptance of environmental priorities by local government elites was not encouraging. Most of the interviewees were unwilling or unable to comment on local

political elites, with perhaps again many of the smaller or single issue NGO interviewees feeling they did not have enough information. Those who commented about local councillor elites did not believe they took the issues seriously as exemplified in this quote from a Friends of the Earth campaigner:

> In the main [name of] the Leader of the council decides what is going to happen, and the impression I have from him is that either he is a very good actor or he's just hasn't got a clue. He doesn't understand the principles of sustainable development. He is just a old fashioned development is good man, and he doesn't hear anything else, any other arguments.

The views of local government, in accepting environmental concerns are discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

How important is housing to local authorities as a policy issue

There was a considerable degree of consensus in the local authority interviews and in other interviewees with third parties, whether MPs, regional government officials or the media, about the significance of housing as a policy issue for local government. Thus, when a senior planner in a district council raised the issue of housing as one of the three main issues the council needed to deal with, they encapsulated views that were repeated regularly in interviews:

> It'svery important because the vast majority of the applications that have a major impact are going to be in some way related to housing in the next few years. Clearly there are other important issues like we've got the potential that the east-west rail link should be coming through the area which clearly is another big important issues and we've had, we are clearly looking at strengthening the employment base and that will remain important but the housing thing is important.

Similarly a longstanding county councillor and chair of the environment committee said:

> What housing development in terms of what numbers of housing and location is I suppose in environment is among the very critical issues that has to be dealt with. I mean I would say possibly is the number one issue. In the context of a county such as this.....I imagine it you know in places like inner London and the North for example regeneration would be, I mean they're not disconnected I know, regeneration is quite important but I would say more important to the South of the country as an issue. Whereas the whole problem of building, you know building development is yeah I would say that most of the county is has been among the most controversial issues.

Housing was seen in all areas of local government, at the district and the county and by senior officers and powerful members as a key issue for local government in Bedfordshire.

The importance of housing as a policy issue was related by many of the interviewees to the high development pressures which resulted from its proximity to London. This view, held by many interviewees is well exemplified by the following quote from the former chair of a district council planning committee

> We're in a real growth area, we have... our house prices jumped..I think over the last couple of years. Whats happening is that London is sticking with its green belt and you frequently..its cheaper for people to live here and pay the astronomical amount they have to pay to travel into London than it is to live in London. Our main problem I think is London and we're only 40 miles from London.

One of the MPs raised the important point that the position of housing as a policy issue is very much grounded in the local arena, in part gaining greater significance from its importance at this level because housing is not a significant issue in national politics:

> Yes indeed, and this is never a national issue. It never features in the general election, but it's nevertheless an issue and it's coming more to the fore locally. I am working with a number of groups who are meeting this week to talk about what the priorities are so I can help them in getting things done.

This is an important point because, as discussed earlier, people usually vote along national lines in local elections, so that even if a local authority is performing well on housing issues this may have no impact on member's chances for re-election. This also links to the point raised in Chapter Four on the media, in which it was pointed out that there had been no increase in media coverage about housing issues in the run up to the 1997 General Election and that stories that were covered at that time made no links with that election. Finally, on the point of the importance of housing as a policy issue at the local level, a regional government official complained about length of time it takes to include new issues within local government:

> It takes a ten or 15 year cycle for ideas to be incorporated into statutory local plans. Is that satisfactory, Is that effective? Or is that delivering or is it a bureaucratic way of burying the issue?

In this explanation delays by local government in producing different stages of local plans could be interpreted as a way of trying to bury a contentious issue.

Local government applying pressure to business interests

There are a number of factors that affect the ability of local government to apply pressure to business successfully. Of course the overall status of local government in relation to central government is an important consideration. Also important, and raised by some interviewees, is the general relationship that exists between business interests and local government in Bedfordshire. Several interviewees cited the significant role in local politics played by big employers, such as the airport near Luton and Boss Trucks in Leighton Buzzard. In the case of Boss Trucks interviewees highlighted the good relationship Boss Trucks seemed to have at national government level, in lobbying for local planning decisions to be overturned and pressing for an inspector's report from a public enquiry to be overturned to allow a new development on a greenfield site. Boss Trucks successfully obtained planning permission for development of new industrial development on a greenfield site. However, shortly after the study period, late 2002, Boss Trucks were suffering financial problems related to a national and international economic downturn in their sector and were planning to end manufacturing in Leighton Buzzard. Some of the interviewees felt that business interest dominated political activity in Bedfordshire over an extended period of time. The following quote from a local authority officer captures the essence of such sentiments:

> I think of councils of being historically very much in the thrall of big employers. And I think that there are large sections within the town, probably reflected in the politics as well, but still see those sorts of things as being vastly more important than environmental issues.

This suggests relationship between business and government where business can dominate local government at least in certain parts of Bedfordshire over certain time periods. This was a view that held some currency amongst interviewees. Similarly a Greenpeace interviewee suggested a relationship between local government and business where local government business is the dominant partner.

> There are plenty of green areas around this town they have built on which they shouldn't have done as far as I'm concerned. But its all about what the council can gain. If the council say they can gain something through Tescos moving in and they look at it and it's the bribe they will always fall for.

This situation of a powerful business and development lobby is viewed by some councillor's with suspicion and resentment. This is clearly exemplified by the newspaper coverage of councillors concerns about the major expansion of Milton Keynes:

> Robert Brown, a councillor for Aspley Guise said 'They are predatory, and in Aspley Guise we do not want to be taken over. We are in green belt and we want to stay that way. The Marston Vale is a great success and we have got to fight for it.' (*Times and Citizen* January 1998.)

This quote is strikingly similar to one from a Friends of the Earth interviewee discussed in Chapter Six which describes development interests as being like circling vultures.

Councillors clearly had an uneasy relationship with house builders, as shown by the predatory quote above. One feature that seems to make this relationship worse is the restrictions on direct meetings between councillors and builders. Councillors expressed very strong reservations about meetings with developers, expressing concern that it could be misinterpreted as trying to obtain personal gain from a too close relationship with development interests. A district councillor of seven years responds with extreme caution and gives an example of a colleague who is a councillor in Oxfordshire who found his position compromised by meeting with developers.

> AC: Have you ever been approached by developers or have you ever directly approached developers yourself?
> Interviewee: No. I would be very wary of any of that because you can quite quickly get into improper sort of relationships.
>
> AC: I wasn't sort of suggesting anything's going on.
> Interviewee: No I just said that for background really that you have to be very very careful. On the council, I'm talking about in Oxfordshire where members wouldn't trust their officers and a group of them arranged a briefing on site with a developer to actually hear straight from them what was happening rather than get it second hand from officers. We were advised and I think this is correct advice, that if you are going to meet developers you should have an officer present, because I think its very dangerous..I think is a very dangerous

> situation, because you are open to accusations and I am sure there was nothing untoward in what they were trying to do but they have opened themselves to accusations of acting improperly.

This sense of frustration also emerged from interviews with developers who confirmed this account from a councillor. The quote below is from a medium sized regional company who operated in Bedfordshire:

> Very occasionally councillors will visit a site that we have applied for planning permission on and we turn up to the meeting but we are not allowed to speak. So the planning officer turns up with the committee members and they discuss the scheme and I am not allowed to talk to anybody.

This very wary response on behalf of councillors makes it appear unlikely that they would be able to enter into a relationship based on partnership and negotiation necessary to secure the 'win-win' outcomes described in the ecological modernisation literature. This quote also suggests problems in the relationship between members and officers which are discussed in this chapter.

On the question of the success of local government lobbying developers to change development proposals there were three differing views that came through from interviewees..A minority argued that local government made little or no impact in improving environmental standards on development proposals. The majority view, held by more than three quarters of interviewees viewed local government as only intermittently successful in applying pressure on developers to raise environmental standards, describing the approach taken by local authorities as ad hoc. The remaining interviewees thought that while much of the work by local authorities was sporadic, overall there was an increase in the level of involvement by local authorities to raise standards. The majority view of an ad hoc approach is well illustrated by an interview with an MP:

> I mean I have seen evidence of them [the district council] certainly trying to retain things like trees and hedgerows and that kind of thing.... There are examples where they have got good practice. I think it's very much a mixed bag and I don't think there is a clear strategic achievement on those things it tends to be very ad hoc and depends on the nature of the site and the developer and even the officer dealing with it.

A large proportion of the interviewees expressed concern about an ad hoc approach to incorporating environmental standards in new build with developers being asked to carry out different measures depending on who the officers where, what village it was in and who the development company were, often poorly related to the environmental issues that arose as a result of the development. A solution to the ad hoc nature of incorporating environmental concerns was proposed by a journalist on a Bedfordshire local newspaper:

> Well there probably needs to be more formal recognition of the whole business of planning gain, which seems to be a very underhand process at the moment. If there were some attempt to regularise that, and take a wider view of the planning process, rather than sticking a house on quarter of an acre....If there was a formal recognising that, and some kind of equation where you could say 'Well, Malden hasn't got the facilities. You've got a certain number of houses in the village, it should have a certain number of facilities' If there were some guidance on that, then than might help.

A proposal for 70 houses in small Mid Bedfordshire town of Flitwick proved a good example of the controversy and confusion that can arise in environmental planning gain, also called Section 106 agreements. The developers, a medium sized Hertfordshire based company, Furlong Homes Ltd, offered the town council £25,000 for poorly specified projects in return for their support of the planning application. However the decision making body for the application is Mid Bedfordshire District Council:

> Flitwick Town Council had earlier indicated it would back the plans, provided it got the money. Mayor [of Flitwick Town Council] Len Lockyer said: 'The town supported the proposals because over a number of years, there have been far too many houses built in Flitwick, its time developers put something back into the community' (*Times and Citizen* May 8 1997)

The proposal was in time rejected by the development control committee in Mid Bedfordshire on strong advise from county traffic engineers about unsafe traffic layouts. In this instance the developers seem to have won the support of the wrong tier of government, the town council which played an advisory role rather than the district council who made the decisions. Also in this instance, while there was some willingness on the part of the Town Council to accept development in return for other community benefits, the failure to describe these new facilities and relate them to the development made the money appear like a bribe and subject to the kind of criticisms of Section 106 agreements in

the previous quote. The processes by which environmental planning gain is negotiated has been a subject of interest in the academic literature (Whatmore & Boucher 1993) where concern has been raised about the extent to which it delivers genuine environmental benefits.

Some interviewees argued that the councils were not successful at all in trying to raise environmental standards in housing developments and in some cases interviewees did not think the councils even tried to raise standards. For example a long serving local authority officer said:

> I think that most local authorities are rather slack in ensuring that developers actually develop things under their terms, despite us having an environmental strategy....The political pressure is there you know... as long as you get the housing onsite the politicians are happy, the developers know that and other considerations are at best secondary.

Similar sentiments are expressed in another quote from a different MP:

> Well I can only speak as I find in terms of actually being built, not necessarily whats' in the planning briefs. The planning policies address most or all of the issues in terms of standards and going beyond just the bricks and mortar. But in terms of what's being built on brown field sites in urban areas, I must say I don't see too much evidence of them having succeeded in putting pressure to achieve particularly high standards.....I think councils should be seeking high environmental standards in terms of energy efficiency and passive solar heating, designing to maximise that which most housing layouts don't take account of at all. Although the council could voluntarily they don't and will probably need to be pushed into building regulations.

Similarly a county councillor and former chair of the environment committee was particularly critical of recent housing developments in Bedford, viewing them as environmentally inferior to developments in the town that took place in the 1960s and 1970s:

> I actually think the outcomes are on the whole environmentally pretty poor. I mean most of the developments that we see I think they are very bad examples. If you look up the road there on the main road [from Bedford] to Milton Keynes and you go across the river where that new bypass is going to be, there's that development up on the bypass which is completely obtrusive, now there's any number of those in the 30s in the North, now you being to see that kind of typical cheap, cheek by jowl housing, all that type of thing, there's a real sort of gash on the landscape and I think, I think there is some insensitive developments, now it depends on who has got the land how they

> get the planning permissions and so on and you really need to look in detail as to how those are levered out. I mean in this area where I live, this area went out in the 60s and 70s further north, it was almost a kind of capitalist approach to urban planning in a way, buy up the land cheap, then they would develop it as an enterprise but it was also very carefully landscaped, you know you could say on the whole they have made it a reasonable environment.

A councillor and former head of a district planning committee attributed the lack of consistent success in influencing developer behaviour to the way officers often left it too late to negotiate with business interests for higher environmental standards

> But if we could persuade the officers there, they get into the plans early enough to influence the developers. They're in there when the developer's plans are not set in concrete, or at least the concrete is still very runny we can alter it. Um, by the time the planning application comes to...comes forward to the council which is the time we see it it's much more difficult to influence.

The view of this interviewee supports the research literature which suggests that local government officers are in a privileged position to influence decisions before plans have been developed into considerable detail in a planning application. But in the case of Bedfordshire, officers are not making the most of this privileged position and using it to environmental advantage. This negotiated approach between the regulator and regulated is an important feature of ecological modernisation and one which in this instance the local authority do not appear to be using, despite pressure from environmental interests.

A possible explanation for this poor performance by local government, raised by a long serving civil servant in regional government quoted below, is that planners are so pre-occupied with the legal procedures of planning that they have become less focused on creating high quality residential environments

> ... virtually every decision taken in a local authority is subject to challenge, because there's a lot of money riding on decisions. That tends to mean that decisions are not taken on what's best or what's interesting, or what's ideal – it's what is defensible in a court of law. Therefore the majority of planners times is not actually taken up with planning, its taken up with administrative procedures to make sure that you meet the standards which the government require and if you like, self preservation measures to ensure that when your decision is challenged in court, when you're planning decision is challenged, your planning appeal, you can't simply say 'because it's a good idea', but you

> can actually say that it ties in with page 26, paragraph 29 of circular 34. So, a very difficult position local authorities are in.

Significantly this focus on the threat of legal challenge contradicts the established view that the courts have a limited role in the UK planning system, focusing on issues of incorrect procedure rather than policy. This relationship defined by a threat of legal action suggests a mainly confrontational relationship between development interests and local authority interests, deeply at odds with the relationship between business and government put forward by proponents of ecological modernisation. It also returns to the point earlier about increased professionalisation of planners. Their professionalisation is focusing on legal and procedural issues rather than those of environmental quality.

A minority of interviewees argued that local government is making progress and slowly and incrementally affecting builders' behaviour, exemplified by this quote from a local journalist:

> You know over a period of time pressure is being brought on builders to do that, by local authorities. I think sometimes these developments work really nicely and other times you think well, how on earth did that happen like that. It doesn't look any more environmentally sympathetic than anything else.

At least this suggests that progress is slowly being made despite some poor development decisions still being made, which is a slightly different viewpoint to the ad hoc explanation of environmental quality projected earlier. Similarly an interviewee from a preservation society comment that South Bedfordshire seemed reasonably successful in resisting pressure from developers to make amendments to the local plan:

> The development plans seem to be very strongly trying to defend the green belt. ..That was challenged very strongly by developers at the public enquiry..as I say we were really very happy with the way they produced that.

This is an important piece of regional variation suggesting that the greenbelt designation provides some strength to South Beds council in its planning conflicts with developers. In conclusion then, the relationship between local government and business was not characterised by mutual trust and joint working towards higher

environmental standards. The most optimistic of the interviewees felt that the positive action by particular officers was leading to improvements or incremental improvements but there was certainly no consensus view that successful pressure by local government was particularly widespread or significant.

Does local government in Bedfordshire accept ecological modernisation?

One of the most significant issues from the interview material was that very few of the interviewees from local government, whether members or officers, were clearly able to articulate the environmental priorities held by their organisation in relation to new housing developments. Most of the local government interviewees could not respond to this question even when promoted. This was particularly surprising given the articulate answers given by other interviewees concerning housing and environmental issues, including MPs, regional government and the media. The quote below is typical of local government interviewee, in this case a councillor in a district council for seven years, who had difficultly in answering this question:

> I suspect a lot of it is case by case. I think its hard to be general but I'm sure the things…… I know the things they [planners] will be looking at are issues …..the obvious greener landscape type issues they are the obvious ones um but also transport, the amenity, the local communities concern for new developments, these things are there and public transport provision…those sort of things are taken into account as well.

This clearly relates to the points made earlier about applying pressure to builders on only an ad hoc basis. The exception to this trend in local government interviewees was the former chair of a district council planning committee who tried to respond after prompting:

> Energy conservation is very low down, you need somebody really shouting about it on the committee… Um traffic is coming right up to the top, it seems to be coming…partly its coming down from the government, but its becoming a very real thing you can actually fight applications on. What else erm. Wildlife, you give lip service to that. Landscape, yes very often if you can go on a site visit which we're very good at doing actually and see the impact that the development has had they'll refuse it.

Despite being able to articulate priorities this quote does not represent an optimistic picture of local government actively engaging with a range of environmental issues. This interviewee also suggests that for issues that are low down there needs to be someone in the local authority actively promoting them. An interviewee in one of the statutory agencies also stressed the importance of individual environmental champions, but still argued that the main policy directions mirrored central government.

> There are environmental champions within local authorities, whether its officers or members and its those individuals that will be pushing the agendas more. In terms of overall policy, I think the biggest influence tends to be government direction so if the government has a particular focus, local authorities will tend to echo that.

Similarly, a former chair of the environment committee at the County Council admitted that the County Council had not really been clear in setting out its priorities, for example by producing a guide for local authorities and developers along the lines of the Essex design guide, described in more detail in Chapter Three:

> We don't have a particular design guide in Bedfordshire as far as I know although what we would be interested in is basically locations and you know where those are going to be or where they are and so on in the County and they are all picking areas which would fit in with the strategy of a) not doing too much amenity damage b) being on transport corridors and therefore you know [being] quite efficient and c) having a kind of optimal population I suppose.

County councils have a more strategic function focusing mainly on the overall location of larger developments rather than individual house scale, however there still appears to be a narrow focus here on amenity and transport and a lack of attention on other locational issues such as energy efficiency.

Perhaps a reason for this inability on the part of interviewees to articulate their priorities can be identified from a regional government interviewee who commented that the very wide range of issues makes it difficult local government to set priorities:

> I wouldn't want to be a forward planner in a local authority, especially a county council because there are just so many issues that you have to consider and balance. I know what I'm pushing, like avoiding flood risk areas, ensuring contaminated land is cleaned up……I think it must be really hard to balance all the issues and know which ones must lead.

This is an important point because if local government is unable to articulate its environmental priorities it can apply no concerted pressure on builders. One of the regional building companies who dealt frequently with Bedford Borough commented, reflecting the general sentiments of the builders:

> Bedford Borough, I don't think they really know what they want. I don't think they have anybody with any particular design flair. They seem to decide on things by going back into the office and having a general chat and finding out what the hierarchy would say about a particular development. I don't find them particularly open to innovation. Um so it can be absolutely anything they could ask you on just because of a personal...and all the conditional matters, very very slow and like I say less able to embrace change and to look at things more positively. I just don't think they know what they are looking for – its head in the sand mentality. You know if we ignore them they will go away.

Some of the most insightful analysis came from another official working in regional government:

> My perception is that the picture is actually very mixed. There are some issues such as those covered by PPG3, where things have been spelt out simple enough and clear enough that local authorities have taken the messages on board and are reflecting these both in the advice that they give to developers and in the actual product that is appearing at the other end. But, some of the environmental issues are sufficiently complex and go sufficiently far beyond the boundaries of individual authorities, that they actually do find it incredibly difficult to deal with. So when you're dealing with issues such as climate change or sea level rise, the eyes of the local authority just glaze over it. If you look for example at PPG25, indicating those areas likely to be subject to either sea flood or flooding, there are some districts, it affects effectively the whole district. They find it, while they're conscious of houses flooding and it's better to build them on higher land, they don't necessarily have the mental elasticity to project forward by ten years or twenty years or one hundred years, and say 'well how do we cope with a situation where the norm is flooding, rather than something that happens once every twenty years when we're not ready for it. And I suppose it's those areas which require a bigger world view, more elasticity of thought,

This suggests some variation in the way different environmental issues are addressed at the local level. In this interpretation, some environmental issues are covered by strong and unambiguous government guidance, the example quoted here from Planning Policy Guidance Three. Here local government can successfully ensure that completed houses conform to the standards set out. The issue of flooding, exacerbated by climate change is more complex, with the causes of the environmental problems

outside the control of the local authority. The situation described here is that a local authority is unable to project the consequences of decisions far into the future.

The interview material and local press coverage also portrayed a local government focused on amenity concerns such as the visual appearance of the built environment, public open space, and retaining landscape features such as mature trees that have traditionally been the focus of land use planning departments and not really engaging in broader issues raised in the literature on sustainability or ecological modernisation. The emphasis on aesthetic design issues by planners is well illustrated by local media reporting of new housing development in Wooton. A proposal to build new barn like houses in the village of Wooton saw the local planners focus on design issues when in fact a range of issues concerned residents including traffic, provision of local facilities and flooding:

> Bedford Borough Council repeatedly opposed plans by the developer Westbury because they disliked the design and layout of the development claiming the houses were too densely packed and there were no long, low buildings 'to reflect the local tradition of barn design'" *Times and Citizen* January 8 1998.

This confirms the findings by Bruff and Wood (1995) that a focus of local authorities is regulating the design and appearance of the built environment.

Interviewees including those in local government very rarely used the term sustainability or sustainable development and when they did it was with negative connotations, for example by 'having sustainability rammed down out throats' from a journalist. However, newspaper coverage showed councillors were sometimes willing to invoke sustainable development to add weight to their arguments. The following quote is in relation to the release of the inspectors report into the SERPLAN examination in public.

> Richard Payne, the council's executive member responsible for the environment said 'The panel's proposals are totally unrealistic for Bedfordshire. At least half of these new houses will have to be built on greenfield sites.....Our forecasts show local jobs will not be available for those who live in the new houses, so leading to further long distance commuting. This flies in the face of all sustainable development principles and will lead to

> increased use of our already overloaded transport network as people are forced to commute to find jobs.' (*Times and Citizen* 15 October 1999)

The way in which the housing proposals contradict the principles of sustainable development is not elaborated, and sustainable development is presented as a reason for rejecting these housing proposals rather than an approach to environmental management or ideology.

NGO interviewees where almost entirely sceptical about the degree of understanding and commitment local government had to raising environmental standards or as an organisation displaying leadership in environmental policy making. The following quotes exemplify this, firstly from a small village based wildlife group concerned with nature conservation.

> They pay lip service to it unless wildlife groups put pressure on them. Because they can't be seen not to be environmentally friendly you do get results but you can't assume public bodies like the council...

And similarly speaking about a district council a spokesperson from Friends of the Earth:

> The councillors have very little interest in the kinds of things that concern us at Friends of the Earth...The chair of the environment committee...I don't know why she got that committee but it obviously didn't mean very much too her.

And finally in a quote from a member of a radical environmental group who had taken part in direct action

> Far too many of our councillors, who are voted in on a particular issue, whether its local or national and its not the general thing that they are well informed about environmental issues all the way through from the common sense stuff to the deep ecology stuff they have no real basic knowledge. And I find it frightening that, you could put in an application that had heavy Agenda 21 implications and their understanding of it is just so poor..

So then across the spectrum of environmental groups there was concern about the level of knowledge and the level of commitment shown by local government. A particularly striking point was there was clear consensus between the builders and the environmental groups on this point. In a quote from a medium sized regional house

builder, the interviewee expressed the same concerns about the level of understanding in local government. Speaking about Ecohomes, the national rating system for green housing she said

> I would say it was something that yes all house builders know that they have to do but it is still fairly tentative at the moment because through the planning system there is no clear way of controlling it to any degree, at the moment or even any erm, great understand of it from planning authorities.

The overall picture from the interviews and particularly the media coverage showed a local government with profoundly anti-development sentiments, focusing on stopping development with very little interest in raising standards. Newspaper coverage often showed councillors forming a strong anti development lobby, often using emotive language more commonly associated with pressure groups. This links to the work of Woods (1998a) discussed earlier where the local state is repositioning itself into an anti-development lobby. There was even some evidence from the media coverage of local government transforming themselves into a pressure group as described by Woods (1998a)

> Residents and councillors are firmly opposed to Milton Keynes Council's proposed expansion into the Marston Vale, and are forming a united front to stop the development. A public meeting is being held in Aspley Guise to launch the campaign. A plan of action will also be formulated to stop housing being built across the Bedfordshire boarder in the Marston Vale, Aspley Guise, Worburn Sands and even beyond. Aspley district councillor Fiona Chapman and Bob Brown, and county and district councillor Tony Duggan have organised the meeting, which is also being support by Jonathan Sayeed, MP for Mid Beds. Coun Chapman said she was urging local residents to rally to the cry and make their views known. (*Times and Citizen* 2 April 1998.)

Here to local council is clearly aligning itself with anti development interests and engaging in pressure group like activities of organising public meetings and issuing press statements. The public meeting resulted in the formation of The Consortium, an environmental group which maintained strong links with district and parish councils.

This anti development view came through particularly strongly with larger developments such as the proposed expansion of Milton Keynes into Mid Bedfordshire.

> Brian Collier, chairman of Mid Beds planning committee said: 'Mid Beds fought hard and long to preserve the natural beauty of the Marston Vale and a multi-million pound lottery bid will boost the area's tourism potential. Mid Beds is already taking more than its fair share of new homes and we will resist further development to protect the areas' rural character." (*Times and Citizen* 22 January 1998.)

Similarly, speaking two years later after the government allocated Bedfordshire 55,600 new houses to be built by 2016, and focused on expanding Milton Keynes by 80,000 Mid Bedfordshire councillors voiced vehement opposition.

> Mid Beds District Council Chairman Fiona Chapman slammed the idea of Milton Keynes crossing the Bedfordshire boarder. Speaking at a public meeting in Salford she said. 'We have a lovely well planned district with lots of green spaces and we do not want their beastly houses here. I find it an absolute insult that they think we want to take their houses.' (*Times and Citizen* 31 March 2000.)

Strong anti development sentiments strongly coalesced around strategic allocations of housing, for example in the government's response to the inspector's report (Crow report) into the examination in public for regional planning guidance. Councillors expressed strong concern about the impact of this regional policy framework on their areas.

> Conservative borough councillor Eric Threapleton said 'There is now a chance an unbroken stretch of concrete will eventually run from Milton Keynes to Luton, people should feel concerned about protecting their local environment."(*Times and Citizen* 10 March 2000.)

There was also a sense that the area had seen enough development and was now saying 'no more'. This is a slight variation on the anti-development view, perhaps accepting some development is acceptable but the speed of development in recent years has been excessive and new developments need to be re-thought as a result. Concern again often manifested itself around particular events, for example, in this instance the plans for 2,400 new houses in the Mid Bedfordshire local plan review.

> Planning officers wanted to change the designation of Marston Moretaine from Large Village to Selected Settlement which would have made it easier to develop. Coun Lake told the Bedfordshire Times and Citizen 'The people of Marston aren't nimbys. Marston has seen a lot of development in recent years and now we are saying no more. (*Times and Citizen* 27 June 1996.)

There were a few isolated examples of council representatives expressing support for some of the general principles of ecological modernisation, for example in the case discussed earlier in this chapter of plans to give £25,000 in exchange for 70 houses in Flitwick:

> Glen Pullen, Flitwick district councillor said 'The potential of the town is enormous, but we need development to bring everything together. Flitwick has fared poorly in the past, developers have been allowed to come in and make hay without giving anything back to the community." (*Times and Citizen* 8 May 1997.)

However, such isolated examples should not be interpreted as a general view from local government that the environment and development interests could be reconciled.

Conclusion Chapter Severn.

Local government has a critical role in ensuring that developers build to higher environmental standards. This key role for the local authorities emerges from the research literature and from the interview material. For example a local MP argued

> From experience developers will get away with the very minimum they can possibly get away with. If they find an easy authority they can roll over they won't spend money if they don't have to. Where they need to – either because they have had previous experience with the local authority or because they know it's a particularly difficult local situation, then I think they start to exercise greater interest in the environment. So it seems to me the constraining factor on the developer is the attitude of the planning authority in terms of dealing with the application.

So local authorities have a critical role to play but the evidence from Bedfordshire suggested they were not acting as a strong force to raise environmental standards for a variety of reasons. In many instances concerning conflicts between environment and development interest, local government may be reluctant to try and enforce higher environmental standards because they are concerned the company will withdraw its investment and there will be problems for local employment. However this concern is much less relevant for housing development so other explanations developed for the reluctance of local authorities to apply pressure. An important contributing factor is the relative lack of power of the local state. In Bedfordshire the shift from government to governance has resulted in institutionally weakened county council and district councils. The two smaller district councils, South Bedfordshire and Mid Bedfordshire

lacked the institutional capacity to cope with larger applications, from their own admission and from government inspector's reports. In part this was due to a lack of continuity with staff as the planning officer could change two or three times during the progress of larger applications. This means tracking environmental features is more difficult, to make sure that enhancements promised in the planning and design stage are delivered at the end of the project. Problematic relationships had also developed between some parts of the county council, particularly highways engineers and some district council departments, mainly planners.

More important than these factors however, direction from central government, particularly over housing numbers greatly reduced local discretion. In attempting to accommodate housing projections sites that would cause environmental damage such as flood plains and sites with significant nature conservation interest were put forward for development. When modest attempts to raise standards were overturned by government inspectors this resulted in local government being vary wary of asking for more significant contributions from developers. Furthermore because of their limited financial resources they were expecting developers to things that would have previously been the responsibility of local government to deliver such as road links. Local government requiring developers to provide these infrastructure features left developers unwilling and with limited funds left to deliver environmental measures. The planner and the councillors always saw development and environmental interests as a conflict and appeared unable to act as a mediator to reconcile these competing interests with outcomes that benefited developers and environmental interests. This failure to accept ecological modernisation by local government will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion. For now the thesis turns to the developers themselves.

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Chapter Eight

House Builders

All developers face environmental challenges when bringing forward new house building developments. Some of these environmental issues are ones that are pushed onto developers from external regulatory sources, such as the legal protection that covers wildlife habitats and archaeological sites. In other instances, environmental issues may be a priority for a company in order to ensure that environmental factors do not impact on the costs of a development, such as the management of building waste material. Developers also face a range of other competing demands from potential buyers, landowners, suppliers and contractors. What tactics are employed by developers when faced with these environmental priorities? One hypothesis that is tested by this research is that developers may, when faced with these challenges, adopt behaviour in line with that predicted by ecological modernisation. That is that, rather than seeing the environment as a burden, they turn it into a positive business opportunity by using higher standards of environmental design to reduce their costs or increase the sale value of a site. Ecological modernisation is not the only explanation for developers building to higher standards. Other explanations could include regulatory pressure from different tiers of government, an attempt to avoid confrontation with environmental NGOs, or pressure from third parties, such as trade bodies, or a greening of the building supply industry. This chapter will explore some of the issues that affect builders' willingness to develop to higher environmental standards. The first of these is the climate for development in the county. It was hypothesised at the start of the research that in areas where house prices are high and the availability of land is subject to restriction, it will be more likely for developers to build to higher standards (e.g. Monk and associates, 1996). Another factor that was considered potentially significant at the start of this research was the size of a builder's operations. Do small builders develop to higher environmental standards because they have to keep working in a local area and cannot afford to get a poor reputation with buyers and local government? They could also develop to higher standards because they are aware of local environmental conditions, such as flood plains and wildlife interest, producing more sensitive developments using their local

knowledge. Alternatively, volume builders may develop to higher standards because they are more aware of new environmentally sound techniques and methods as a result of their own research and development, or their staff attending continuing professional development events. They may also have more financial resources to employ internal or external expertise in areas such as nature conservation, surface water management and landscape

It has been argued that many of the structures in the land use planning system favour the interests of house builders (Rydin, 1986). Rydin points to the success of builders in influencing the local housing strategies of local authorities. Joint studies examining land availability are just one example of the privileged access house builders can enjoy in the policy process. Eden (1999) argues that many UK business groups have long argued that only they are 'expert' enough to develop appropriate regulatory criteria because they are specialist in particular operations and processes. House builders here are following a national trend where business becomes closely involved in the regulation of its own activities. This view is echoed by Adams and May (1992) who found that landowners, including house builders, were far more likely to get their objections to local plans accepted than other groups. The success rate for pro development objects in Adams and May's study was 50% compared to 35% for anti development objections. Adams and May attribute their success in part to superior financial resources held by development interests. For example, 47% of pro development objections used professional representation compared to 2% of anti development objections. However, Rydin (1988) has also argued that not all developers have equal influence, as those larger builders, often members of the House Builders Federation, have more influence than smaller builders, collectively represented by the Federation of Master Builders. The larger builders co-operation is needed by local government to ensure that housing strategies are implemented and housing numbers met. Here the larger companies are a vital element in policy implementation whereas smaller builders, and other interests such as environmental interests are marginal. . In more recent work Bramley and associates (1995) argues that structures such as public inquiries and appeals favour larger developers. However powerful development interests are relative to other local actors, they still need to work within the structures and practices of the planning system. Gibbs and Jonas,

working in a US context, argue that developers may welcome efforts to become engaged in land use planning. Taking Orange County as a case study, an area subject to rapid economic development, companies with a strong interest in further urban development such as the Irving Ranch Company have taken an active role in local plan making. In attempting to secure a more predicable regulatory environment for its land development activities, the company has sought comprehensive, long term solutions to land use conflicts, including the inclusion of land in ecosystem based conservation plans in exchange for development permits on other land not containing protected species (Gibbs & Jonas 2000).The development of a planning system favours some development interests more than others. Weiss (1987), also working in a US context describes how zoning systems in Los Angeles were introduced to further the interests of 'quality' community builders and squeeze out the 'cowboy' land subdividers, who promised quality plots but delivered unserviced plots far from reasonable quality transport. These issues are explored later in the chapter where developer's alternative strategies are examined, whether to participate in forward planning and develop on sites welcomed by regulatory bodies or whether to submit applications on green belt sites and other designations likely to be viewed unfavourably.

Housebuilders diverge from other sectors of British industry because of the lack of innovation in their sector. This has been remarked upon by a number of commentators including Goodchild (1994), Barlow (1999) and Ball (1999). Goodchild (1994) argues that conservativism in design if taken to an extreme is unhealthy. It hinders the ability of designers to adapt the built environment to change. It also hinders the ability of built materials manufacturers to compete with those on the continent where innovation in housing design is more common and is sometimes actively promoted by government research programmes. Goodchild (1994) argues that potential sources for innovation in housing design are very seldom even discussed. Barlow (1999) attributes the lack of innovation to the business strategies adopted by many building firms which focused on capturing inflationary gains from housing and land markets with innovation in building process and design being of secondary importance. The current land use planning system also encourages firms to 'rent seek' by winning planning permission on sites where it was unexpected. Hamel (1996) argues that in

many industries, poorer financial conditions push companies into innovation. This does not happen in the housing sector as company's strategy in most instances is growth or withdrawal rather than innovation. Indeed the severity of the swings in the volume of sales and the prices at which sales are achieved means house building firms revenues and profits are uncertain and volatile. This is in marked comparison to the average volatility across other EU countries (Ball, 1999). This volatility in the UK market prompts firms to maintain traditional flexible building techniques with a heavy reliance on sub contractors and have low amounts of fixed capital on building sites. Barlow further argues that structural features of the house building industry such as the reliance on sub contractors means that the industry operates disjointedly with different capacities to innovate. Gan and Senker (1993) also highlight the failure of past efforts within the industry that resulted in failure, particularly the attempts to change to timber frame building that did not produce the expected cost savings. The failure of this innovation is attributed to the lack of necessary inadequate intra and inter organisational changes, particularly training.

Despite this lack of innovation the environment is not completely ignored by house builders. The literature here offers some pointers to the issues this research should consider when examining the links between housing and the environment. Much of the literature concerning housing developers in Britain only makes passing reference to their response to environmental considerations. An exception to this is work by Pascione (1990) who examines a case study of development in a village in the Glasgow greenbelt which raises three significant environmental issues, amenity open space, landscape and the assimilation of waste into the environment. He examines the ways in which the developer tried to make their proposal more acceptable to the local authority by offering to build its own sewerage treatment facility for the new development and provide public open space on the undeveloped land that it owned. Landscape issues were also addressed as the developer argued that the development represents a logical rounding off of the village. The environment here features as a physical necessity for the assimilation of waste or as an amenity for recreation.

The Climate for House Building in Bedfordshire

What is the climate like for house builders operating in Bedfordshire? This question has a number of dimensions, but there did emerge a strong degree of overall consensus from interviewees. The overwhelming majority of interviewees thought that the climate was good for developers, with 50 of the 52 interviewees making this point. So there is a clear picture coming through from interviewees that the economic climate is favourable to development interests. This was mainly 'good' in terms of developers being able to sell their products quickly and for good prices, but some interviewees expressed reservations about parts of the county and noticed slight variations over time. This section will present evidence gathered from interviews on the economic climate and explore some of the reservations about economic prospects that were held by interviewees. In this regard it is worth noting that the views of builders matched those of other informants. As a good indication, the views of the majority are well represented by the comments of a CPRE interviewee:

> The market is very buoyant in London and the South East really and although it goes up and down a little bit in prices, sometimes fall back a little bit and so on, the market is very buoyant generally speaking. I say up and down a bit but it is very buoyant at the moment, there's plenty of money around, but at the same time developers can't get all the permissions they want, because of environmental and local planning constraints, and in a way that's what's making the sites they can get buoyant, and well, well, because there aren't enough, the demand is greater than the supply. Bedfordshire is, we're well within the London commuter area and it's a relatively prosperous area. Of course there are pockets of poverty, but generally speaking they can sell what they build.

The significant role of London commuters and other long distance commuting in driving up house prices was raise by a number of interviewees, including the CPRE interviewee above, a number of other environmental groups and local government interviewees. The strong influence of commuting is well exemplified by the following statement from a councillor and former chair of a planning committee:

> We're in the real growth areas. We have..... our house prices have jumped, I think over the last couple of years. What's happening is London is sticking with its green belt and you frequently, it's cheaper for people to live here and pay the astronomical amount they have to pay to travel in and out of London than it is to live in London. But we also get [workers], like from Leeds, people who want to live somewhere more... you can not blame them for that. But our main problem is London and we're 40 miles from London.

Countryside management environmental groups were particularly aware of the strong housing market. Part of their remit was land acquisition and

management. This was felt to be strongly hampered by increases in agricultural land prices, which were seen to be rising owing to speculation over the future of agricultural land that was seen as potentially developable land.

While the majority of interviewees were optimistic about the economic prospects for housing developers, the interviewees who were most positive about the climate for house building were MPs. They saw a good climate for house building as a sign of the prosperity and success of their constituency. Their comments about growth seemed unconnected from later comments by the same MPs who expressed concern about poor environmental standards in new house building. Their views are, however, typical of many third party interviewees and some in local government who viewed economic growth as an overriding political priority. These sentiments are well illustrated in the following message from a local MP:

> Very good. It's an area of expansion. The government has designated that we should have something like 30,000 plus more people by the end of the decade so that's quite a few more houses. So it's good. There is a general presumption in favour of planning and building houses in areas that have already been designated as open for house building and I would have thought that Mid Beds is as good as any area in the country for this.

Despite the suggestion that there is a presumption in favour of building, the point about house builders having problems gaining planning permission that was raised by the CPRE interviewee (below) was also raised by a number of interviewees, including groups near Bedford who were campaigning against large developments there. The end-product, for the majority of interviewees who expressed a view on housing completion rates, was that new dwelling numbers are less than might be expected:

> It appears that when the houses are built they appear to be sold, but I don't think anything like the number of houses the government says should be built, are being built, but this is mainly that the builders can't generate the houses quickly enough. For many years Bedfordshire has been producing fewer houses than they should have done according to government guidelines.

Very similar views were expressed by a councillor of seven years from Bedford:

> The number of homes that are being built isn't anything like the targets set by the county structure plan and the government housing targets, it's nowhere near building enough houses compared with the targets set. I think that is more to do with the unrealistic targets than anything else.

This view was prominent among interviewees in and around Bedford, which may be due to very slow progress on the larger sites that have been allocated for development near the town. These included Elstow Storage Depot and the Biddenham Loop, the

first of which is on the brownfield site of the Elstow Storage Depot, while the second is in a loop of the river near the village of Biddenham.

Where interviewees did express concern about the financial prospects of housebuilding, this often related to problems in the wider economy that impacted on Bedfordshire, as exemplified in the views of one local MP.

> I mean obviously the world economy is under question and has been so for some time, now especially so. But in terms of this county there are still a lot of sales and there is pressure for more housing because of smaller household size and that's a clear demographic and sociological trend of decades. Bedford in this area will continue to come under pressure, and maybe more so. I don't think there is any shortage of trade and work over here really.

Similar concerns were expressed by a journalist at a Bedfordshire newspaper:

> Well there seems to be a lot [of housebuilding] going on at the moment. I mean, as we speak the whole climate about everything is very uncertain. Were it not for the war situation I think it would be fine.

The MP and the journalist argued that the economy and housebuilding prospects were basically sound but that wider political uncertainty was causing problems, perhaps leading to greater cautiousness about major financial decisions like buying a house.

However, there were two interviewees who expressed more deep-seated reservations about economic prospects for housing development in Bedfordshire. A long serving County Council officer expressed concern about other factors, particularly the global economy, impacting on employment, which would in turn affect house prices.

> I think the thing is it's probably not as buoyant as some areas in terms of, I think it's probably the difficulties of travel by both road and rail, and the lack of employment in the area. We've had a number of firms in Bedfordshire close down over the last few years, Texas Instruments moved out, [a] Rolls Royce subsidiary here closed down, which used to make massive engines which were used all over the world, that's gone, quite a number of hard engineering businesses have gone to the wall and the later, sort of mid 60s and 70s turned to new technologies. I think it's largely because you know, you can get computer parts made in Taiwan a lot cheaper than you can in the UK, and it's difficult to find a, say employment types, that are heavy in manpower. You can set up like Asda, you can set up a distribution centre, huge place, the number of people employed....

Although only two of the interviewees raised significant concerns about the Bedfordshire economy, they had both worked in Bedfordshire for some time in strategic planning, with the previous quote having been with the county council.

Illustrating the nature of economic concerns is the following quote from a senior planning officer in a district council:

> The housing market. It's not particularly strong and it's weaker than in surrounding counties. ...I'm sure people in Mid Beds have told you that Sandy is somewhere where houses have got developed really quickly, because of its relative proximity to Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, where prices are a lot higher. So there are pockets, and likewise there are pockets in South Beds where people are sheltering from Hertfordshire house prices.

It was in relation to strong house prices in Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire that Bedfordshire was unfavourably compared in terms of the buoyancy of the local housing market. Very similar views were expressed by one of the village societies, in comparing Bedfordshire to prices in neighbouring counties:

> I think people now regard Bedfordshire as a relatively cheap place to buy a house compared to say Hertfordshire, as properties are probably another 25 per cent higher and Buckinghamshire is similar. [Bedfordshire] is as good a place for builders as Hertfordshire has been in the past.

These views were echoed by the builders themselves who argued that while house prices were lower than in Hertfordshire, they were rising quickly.

> As soon as you cross over the boundary there is a huge difference between a Hertfordshire address and a Bedfordshire address. But saying that prices have risen so much recently that a lot of people are moving further and further away and that has implications on places like Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire. (Volume builder)

Any difficulties faced by builders in Bedfordshire should be met with some reservations. The scale of builders difficulties in the current economic climate was not considered particularly serious in an interview with a long serving county councillor

> It's really a question of land releases. They have got their hands on a lot of land. At the moment house prices are either stable or rising and mortgage rates are as low as they can possibly be. I can't imagine builders are saying it's bad now. They are a bit like farmers, they would say that anyway. There is never a good time for them.

So the overall picture from the interview material is one where developers are seen as being in a position where they can easily sell the houses they build at an acceptable price, even if the Bedfordshire market is not as favourable as in some neighbouring counties. While developers did seem to have some problems gaining planning permission, particularly in bringing forward larger development sites around Bedford, in some ways this worked to their advantage, as it helped keep prices higher. The only reservations expressed by interviewees about the economic climate for building related to wider concerns about the global economy.

Variation in Development Pressure Across the County

However, the picture across the whole of the county is not an even one, with some areas subject to more development pressure, because they are seen to be more desirable. This may be more desirable given good transport links to the north and south, towards Hertfordshire or Cambridgeshire, which accounts in part for the popularity with house buyers and developers of the towns of Sandy and Bigglewade. Desirable may also mean living in a residential environment with a high environmental quality, such as villages like Woburn or Aspley Heath. Gerald Eve (Gerald Eve et al 1992) has explored the way in which concern for the environment in more prosperous urban fringes and some rural areas has lead to strong resistance to land releases. This in turn has kept property prices high in these areas, 30% in the cases they studied. In some instances desirable qualities of an attractive rural environment and good transport access can be combined. For example, the village of Harlington has a large number of well preserved medieval houses and is surrounded by a mixture of farmland and woodland. Harlington also has a fast rail link to London and Bedford. These more exclusive villages are often seen as difficult places for builders to gain planning permission for new build. But as well as desirable locations, this section will also explore housing pressure in areas that could potentially be less desirable. These include the villages of north Bedfordshire, which have poor transport links, and the area of Marston Vale. The Marston Vale has been subject to intense periods of mineral exploitation, serving the national demand for bricks in the period of rebuilding and growth that followed the Second World War (Blowers, 1984). The exploitation of Marston Vale for minerals and the subsequent filling of the mineral workings for landfill has created a zone of lower environmental quality than the rest of Bedfordshire. The mineral workings have removed all past landscape features, including hedgerows, trees and small woodlands. Then the land filling created the environmental nuisances of noise, odour and litter, as well as more recent concerns about links between landfills and serious health problems. A recent report by Cambridge Econometrics (2003), looking nationally at the blight caused by landfills, revealed that the value of properties situated less than quarter of a mile away from a landfill site was an average of £5,500 lower than the value of similar houses that were

not near landfill sites. Houses between a quarter and half a mile from landfills were on average £1,600 lower.

It was anticipated at the start of the research that in areas where gaining planning permission was more difficult, developers would respond in several ways. For one, they could try building to higher environmental standards, as a way of securing permission to build from development control committees. Alternatively they could abandon wasting time and money on applications for areas in which they perceived that their applications are unlikely to succeed, which should result in a greater emphasis on placing applications in areas that are subject to weaker planning restraint. Another option is to put forward other kinds of applications for areas of tight planning constraint, ones that are considered more likely to gain planning permission, such as garden centres or golf courses, which are sometimes perceived by planners as more compatible with the countryside, particularly within the green belt. This third option was identified as a strategy by a number of interviewees, including Friends of the Earth and the CPRE. An exemplar they provided of this kind of approach was a proposal for a garden centre in Aspley Guise. Also identified was a more general tendency in green belt areas for developers to make applications that focus on extensions to existing houses rather than new buildings. The interpretation of such actions by interviewees was that developers recognised the potency of land-use planning regulation, such that developers realised they were unlikely to gain planning permission for new housing in the green belt (as reported for the area around Leighton Buzzard) and instead promoted golf courses and garden centres. As one Friends of the Earth interviewee put it:

> Large chunks of our green belt are owned by developers. And they are just waiting for their chance. They put they put applications in and they get turned down and this goes on and on and on and the trouble is you waste a lot of energy like that 'cause someone wants a garden centre there and everyone objects and it goes away and someone else comes along and wants to put a golf course and we all object and they get turned down and [the land is] sold to somebody else..... But the people who own the green belt are not after it for housing, they are after it for golf courses and garden centres, oh and possibly housing..... only if they think they can

> get away with it. They might do it if they thought they could but they are forced to try more sort of er greenbeltish type things.

An overall picture of development pressure across the county was hard to achieve because few interviewees, including those in local government, were able to give a clear picture outside their immediate area. There were only really two interviewees, a CPRE interviewee and a long serving County Council officer, who offered a clear picture of development pressures across villages throughout Bedfordshire. This is not to suggest that all CPRE interviewees or all those working for some time at the County Council had a strategic appreciation. Rather it was specifically these two interviewees, because of their long-term interest in environmental planning in the county. Capturing the view of the CPRE interviewee on the pattern of development that is occurring across Bedfordshire villages is the following statement:

> Going north of Bedford, all the villages up and down there, very pretty villages. Most out of touch because it was a bit far for commuting, there wasn't a station and it was a protected area. Whereas [in] sort of the cabbage-field villages across the middle of the county, Clifton, Shefford, Henlow, even Silsoe and the Martson Vale, there has been a lot of housing.

Similarly the County Council officer agreed that development was restricted in the north of the county, not because of problems for developers but due to planning constraint.

> Well I think they're avoiding some of the more rural parts of the county, not because they don't want to build there but because they know [the] policy framework is such that they are very unlikely to get much development there. I mean, there has been development in the rural areas but you know, relatively small scale or one-off single houses, things like that, but if they could get their hands on, I mean most of them will probably have the land under control, some sort of option, all over the county. But if the policy framework was different they would happily build anywhere I'm sure in Bedfordshire.

So, in the view of this interviewee, factors such as remoteness from transport infrastructure that once limited development in the north of the county are no longer so important.

But while some interviewees laid stress on the uneven force of land-use planning regulation, around two-thirds who expressed a view, 22 of the interviewees, argued that there were no areas of Bedfordshire that were exposed to less development

pressure for housing. Not in the sense at least that developers avoided putting applications for housing forward because they knew they would meet resistance from the council or from environmental groups. This view was especially prevalent amongst village societies, with the tone of their messages illustrated by the statement: "Every piece or blade of grass, someone wants to build on". Overall, among environmental groups, thirteen out of 16 thought there were no areas developers avoided, with only three thinking that developers did avoid some areas. This balance of views was also common among councillors, with one district councillor and former chair of a planning committee capturing the general view on builders from within planning committees: "They are desperate for land and they go just about anywhere, anything they can get they try". Although some councillors were reluctant to express a view, saying they did not know what happened in much of the county, amongst those who did express a view, six thought developers did not avoid any areas while two thought developers avoided some places.

Among the 22 interviewees who argued developers did not avoid any areas, some elaborated, pointing to particular failings in statutory designations that are intended to limit development, such as the green belt, conservation areas and areas shown on local plans and Environment Agency plans as in the flood plain. These designations were viewed by these interviewees as offering very limited protection against housing development proposals. Of course, the green belt only affects the south of the county, so it is interviewees from here, particularly around Leighton Buzzard, who commented on the threat to the green belt. To be clear on this point, it was not only environmental groups who felt that the green belt was under intense development pressure but also council officers. Illustrating the messages received from this quarter, a planning officer from south Bedfordshire held that:

> We've got tremendous pressure on us from people [who] commute from London who all want to live here and commute back to London, so it's quite a lot of pressure. I think all the big guns are just sat around pointing at us for the next green belt review, which will be initiated through the structure plan review. And of course the next structure plan review will inevitably recommend us for a green belt review.

The lack of faith in designations was a particular feature of those environmental group interviewees who argued that they were not effective in modifying developer behaviour. As the interviewee below, from one of the village societies, argued:

> So essentially it's all the medieval cottages [in the village centre], the listed buildings which are grade two and grade one. So our principal concern is to maintain that amenity and stop encroachment because there is, the truth of the world is that, when something is desirable, it's always desirable to somebody to make money out of it. So it's a nice area to live, it must be a nice area to build a house. There's always somebody wanting to take just that medieval house and say, 'well, I could actually put another house on the side of this and make a lot more money'. So we have to be careful about maintaining the integrity of the conservation area.

This interviewee captures the general sense put across by actors in all the groups of interviewed agents, which is that the very features that made an area special and worthy of protection are also an encouragement to developers. This might mean that there is a clash between developers and planning authorities over proposals, but the consistent message from 22 interviewees was that they did not see land-use restraint working in a way that imposed severe constraints on builders, even in zones of supposedly tight constraint. Thus, interviewees regarded the green belt and conservation areas as an insufficient deterrent to developers putting in applications. The following view illustrates the kind of argument that was put forward in support of this conclusion, in this case taken from an interview with one of the village societies:

> ... since we are surrounded by green belt it's true to say that every single field around here had some sort of application. I doubt you will find a single metre of ground here that someone hasn't got somebody attempting to take an option out on it to convert it to a building site.

Linked to this, interviewees had a sense that land-use protection was weakening. As expressed by a village society representative from close to Luton, green belt protection for the area around the village had declined in importance, and:

> We fight very hard but they are skilled fighters as well. Previously the protection of the greenbelt was a huge barrier. Now it's not so sacrosanct. It is a problem.

Similar views were expressed by other informants on greenbelt designations. Indeed, as an interviewee from an environmental group in Leighton Buzzard argued, while one developer may tire of making unsuccessful applications on a green belt site, there is always another builder to pursue a development option:

> So every few years they put in a planning application [it] is refused, they just keep testing it. Some of them have given up. The trouble is they sell it [the site] to another developer and they have another go, so you never seem to be free of it.

This persistence among developers was also reported in local media coverage. For example, the Fairfields playing fields and public open space in Biggleswade was subject to planning applications for residential development in 1978 and 1988 and

again in 1996 (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 3rd May 1996). Similarly developments in satellite villages around Bedford, including Bidenham and Bromham, had seen repeated proposals for developments throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Likewise the designation of an area as being prone to flooding by the Environment Agency was not viewed as preventing developers from putting in applications. One interview with a village society, in which discussion took place on developments in a nearby village, exemplifies the kind of views that were expressed:

> A large amount of building is going on around us. And Arlsey, their flood plain is being built on at the moment. Don't buy houses there. They claim to have raised the flood plain but I don't know.

So far this section has examined whether local actors with an interest in house building feel that designations are resulting in developers exerting less development pressure on certain areas. Also significant for this research are the areas of the county that face particularly intense development pressure. A number of interviewees highlighted the developments in the Marston Vale in this context. As expressed in an interview with an employee of an environmental group, while the overall housing market was strong, particular areas of Bedfordshire were seeing even greater development pressure:

> There is an awful lot going on and the prices of houses are generally quite high. We have got quite a good corridor down to London and also Milton Keynes in the area. And they are all expanding. There are large developments at Marston Morretaine and Wotton. The money seems to be, well, people who want to commute to London especially.

Again, the issue of commuting corridors is raised by this interviewee. As well as this, a number of interviewees raised the issue of housing development in the Marston Vale. This area was once an unpopular one with developers due to its legacy of mineral extraction, brick making and landfills. However, landscape improvements have been made to some old mineral workings, there has been a gradual decline in brick production and the importance of the area as a corridor to Milton Keynes has increased. These changes were widely recognised as having led to an adjustment in developer preferences for building in the Marston Vale. As a CPRE spokesperson expressed it:

> At one time we used to think the Marston Vale, particularly round the brick works and clay pits and so on, where the landfill were a bit of a no, no for developers at one stage, but that's all changed. And actually we

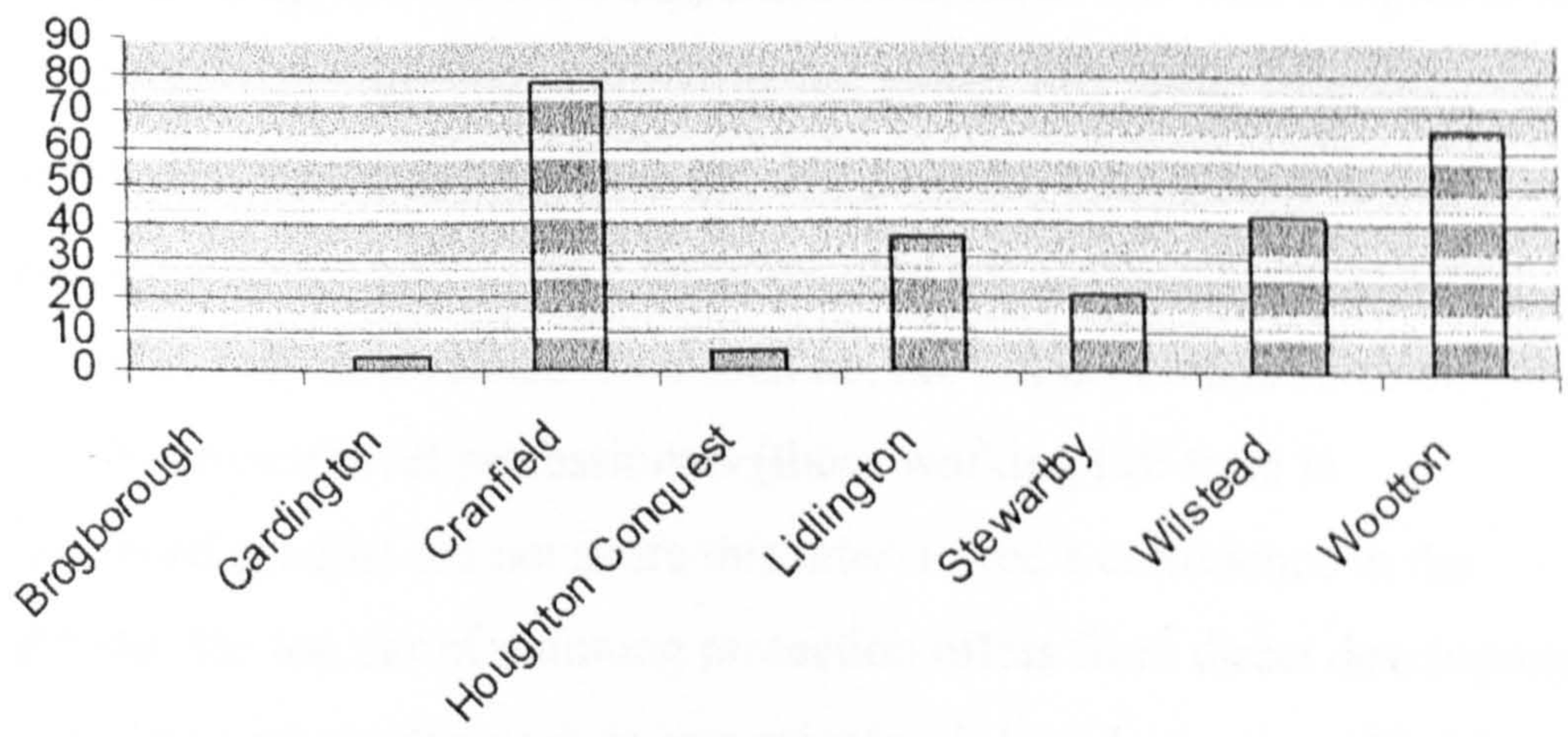
> think the developers have got their eye on the Marston Vale very much more than they used to have.

A long serving county council officer captured general sentiments about the recent popularity with developers of the Marston Vale:

> I mean even the Marston Vale, where you know there's clearly problems in terms of its image and the landfill, there's no shortage of developers willing to bring forward land in that area. And to bring it forward there, to be quite honest, they'll bring it forward anywhere in the county.

This particular pressure on Marston Vale is also significant in Chapter Seven, where local government displayed 'pressure group' like behaviour to try and counter what they saw as external and unwanted development pressure. This interview material is in part backed up by the planning application data. There have been significant numbers of housing completions in some villages in Marston Vale, including at Cranfield and Wootton. However, Brogborough, a Marston Vale village adjacent to a very large landfill site, has seen no housing completions at all over the five year study period. The level of development in the Marston Vale villages is illustrated in Figure 8.1. This illustrates the lack of completions in Brogborough but the relative boyance of the other villages , particularly Cranfield and Wootton.

Figure 8.1 Planning completions in the Marston Vale



The lack of housing in Brogborough was also a local media issue:

> While nearly every village in Mid Bedfordshire braces itself to fight an anticipated flood of housing development, Brogborough is actually appealing for more homes to be built. The irony is that Brogborough is the one village most unlikely to appeal to developers – because of fears of contamination about former brick work owned land surrounding it.

> Planners have been told by the Government that 8,600 new homes must be built in the Marston Vale between now and the year 2011. While other villages gear up to fight new housing development, Brogborough Parish Council wants to see 200 new homes built. District councillor Fiona Chapman said. 'Brogborough is a former London Brick Village and unlike other villages actually wants to expand. The irony is that a lot of the land available around it is contaminated and therefore either unsuitable for homes to be built on, or expensive to clean up'. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 1st September 1996)

So while some villages in Marston Vale have overcome their previous negative images and are seeing significant levels of new development, others, particularly Brogborough, have not overcome the problems of their industrial past.

Having examined the case put forward by the majority of interviewees that developers were largely unconstrained by the planning system or by local political pressures, this next section will examine the alternative view. This is held by a minority of nine of the interviewees, who felt that housing in villages was systematically blocked, with no development taking place at all in many villages. Here interviewees, most of whom were councillors and third parties, including an MP, a journalist and a regional government official, pointed to the role of green belt designation and other planning factors in deterring developers from submitting applications. As expressed in an interview with a representative of a countryside management environmental group, this group of interviewees held to the view that particular land-use designations were effective. For example, in holding that: "I don't think we now see any attempt to develop SSSIs, I think they now realise it's a total no, no." It is perhaps surprising that more of the environment professionals (those working full-time in environmental groups) did not share this interviewee's confidence in the strength that the top tier of planning protection offers from direct development pressure. Their whole approach to campaigning is based on using official channels such as responding to planning documents which relies fundamentally on the planning system accepting the importance of such sites. Indeed, despite the reservations of many interviewees about the green belt, some interviewees expressed confidence in this designation, as illustrated in an interview with a local MP:

> I mean only because I know broadly speaking the green belt and I know about constraints in countryside and village planning policies, village

> envelopes that sort of stuff. I think they have tended to go where they are more likely to succeed rather than put up great cases and battles for developments where it's totally opposed.

Only two interviewees from environmental and civic groups highlighted the role of the green belt as a constraining factor on development. This may be because the environmental groups were particularly aware of a relatively few areas of greenbelt that were under development pressure and were less conscious of the larger area that was not facing development proposals. Indeed, it tended to be interviewees involved with planning issues for a long time period, alongside groups that covered a wide geographical area, that were more inclined to see the green belt as having had a notable impact. Such groups were able to give a wider perspective on the green belt, as illustrated by the comments of one CPRE interviewee:

> Because here is a green belt village we don't have.... this is the green belt, and the green belt is washed over, and therefore there are not those kind of [large] schemes that would come with big environmental benefits.... It [the house building climate] has been very constrained, especially in the green belt and [the] area of great landscape value. Because of the RPG and the housing need, I think it's opening up a bit and I think the latest local plan is going to open up the villages a bit more.

There was some evidence from the review of the South Bedfordshire local plan that the green belt played a very significant role in determining which sites were put forward to the local plan enquiry as suitable for housing. Hence, two sites in the small village of Studham, two sites in the small village of Kensworth and one site in the village of Totternhoe, were all refused consideration for inclusion in the draft local plan on green belt and general environmental grounds.

The strongest sentiments that development was blocked in villages came from councillors in the north of the county, beyond the green belt. A number of these councillors thought that development in rural areas beyond the green belt in north Bedfordshire was so restricted that no development took place at all. This view is illustrated by a councillor from this northern area, who held that:

> There is a total ban on any house building in many of the villages and parishes. I live in [village in north Bedfordshire]. Now ... [the village in north Bedfordshire] is according to planners a small, rural hamlet in open countryside. There is a field that separates [the village] from the A1, the amount of industry in the A1 corridor is enormous but that is still classed as open countryside.

This view of developments being blocked in north Bedfordshire villages was often cited by those who held that the lad-use planning system was effective in limiting

builder actions. Illustrative of this sentiment was the following endorsement of a local journalist:

> They were going to try and get planning consent to put some houses in the countryside, for people who had actually been born there. And the local plan would not be able to do that. I think they only wanted to build about 15 houses, just an extension to a tiny village. And the guy that represented the place said, 'I think it's just ridiculous, obviously I recognise it's been a greenbelt village, it's a protected area, but I have been in this village for over 20 years and we have never yet been given permission to build anywhere in our ward'.

The issue of a blockage on housing in North Bedfordshire was the subject of four long articles and numerous letters in the local media in the summer and autumn of 2000. The highlighting of this issue was brought about by seven councillors from north Bedfordshire who formed a cross party alliance to lobby about this issue. The group of seven councillors spokesperson was Councillor Don Clarke, who criticised the long delays that these villages experienced in developing new housing:

> In Wyboston we have been waiting for affordable homes to be built for nearly three years so there has to be a much faster response to these demands otherwise the problem goes away because people have to move somewhere else.....Local people should dictate where their environment is going, provided the neighbours don't object and you don't build a sky scraper in the middle of a village. (*Bedford Times and Citizen* 20th October 2000).

The views of these councillors were backed in the local media and by the Countryside Agency, whose representative expressed concern about Bedfordshire villages becoming dormitories and promoted the Agencies' approach of village design statements. Planners at Bedford Borough seemed to respond to these concerns only slowly and reluctantly, although the head of planning, David Bailey, did meet with the group of seven councillors. It emerged that the villages, through their parish councils, had been consulted on their status as areas of restraint, but they had not realised how stringently this would be applied. Following this, the issue was the passed from the Borough Council to be considered by the County Council's new rural strategy, so effectively neutralising further debate on the issue for the time being. This debate about development in villages being inappropriate relates to an idyllic view of villages that has evolved that is nostalgic, agricultural and romantic, rooted in a past that is largely mythical. This idyllic view characterises all

villages as precious environments that will be damaged if modern development is allowed to go ahead (Owens, 1995).

But while there was concern from some quarters about development being restricted in this area, as one village society representative from near Bedford argued, the (district) Council was adopting a more pragmatic view, as it had steered development away from remoter rural areas, not out of concern for the environment or due to planning dogma about rural development, but because the Council was concerned about the cost to itself of providing infrastructure:

> I can think of several places north of here [Bedford] where developers have tried over the years and been reviled... where the Council have a definite policy and where they [developers] now keep away from it. I'm thinking about the area at Green Lanes towards the golf course and because of the lack of infrastructure there the Council have been so strongly against it, and I think now there is very little development mooted because of that.

There were no village societies in the north of the county and North Bedfordshire CPRE folded in 1995 (as emerged from a telephone conversation with the former chairman), so there is no corroboration of councillors views from environmental groups on site. But the interview material is partially endorsed by the Local Plan for Bedford Borough, which also covers rural north Bedfordshire.

> In the rural area, a general policy of restraint applies to new development. In villages this is normally limited to infilling on sites which are physically contained by existing development....Infilling: this term refers to filling a small gap in an otherwise built up frontage and does not include as is commonly believed, building on a field or other enclosure of land within the village. (Bedford Borough Council Local Plan. Adopted 1993 p33)

The Local Plan goes on to make a firm case for retaining undeveloped land in villages on landscape and character grounds. This wording is almost identical to the previous Local Plan, which was done in sections, with the rural north of the Borough having its own development plan in 1990. This is significant because it suggests that for over 10 years there has been a consistent policy of restraint for the villages in the north of the county. This is further confirmed by the very low level of media reporting of housing developments in north Bedfordshire. Thus, for all six Bedfordshire newspapers over the study period (1995-2000), there were only eight articles about housing developments in the 42 north Bedfordshire villages. These villages (Felmersham, Little Staughton, Pavenham, Podington, Radwell, Risley, Sharnbrook and Thurleigh)

only had one article on each of them. This compares to villages close Bedford, such as Renhold or Biddenham, which had 12 and 14 articles on them, respectively. A similar pattern emerges from the planning application data for Bedford Borough. Figure 8.2 shows the housing completions in the period 1995-2000 in the villages of north Bedfordshire. Seventeen of the villages had 5 houses or less built in that period, or an average of one house per year or less. In contrast the satellite villages around Bedford, such as Renhold, Bromham, Clampham, Biddenham and Wootton, had all seen more than 50 new dwellings completed each during the study period. Those villages that saw a moderate level of development but were away from Bedford, such as Milton Earnest, Turvey, and Great Barford, which all had at least 25 completions, were all on main roads. This lends some credence to the interview evidence that infrastructure, including transport infrastructure, was a significant factor in limiting development in some of the north Bedfordshire villages. Moreover, the focus on concentrating development in the satellite villages around Bedford is perpetuated in the most recent Local Plan. Hence, the version approved by Bedford Borough Council in November 1996, which had to go forward to a public enquiry, allocated 45% of all development in the Borough to Biddenham and Bromham.

Interview material from builders provided a further insight into the lack of development in the north of the county:

> Our range really from [the north London headquarters] is about Bedford Town. Between here and Bedford Town we get a measure of stability and return per square foot or per metre that we build, and when you get past London to Bedford there is a slow decline to Bedford. When you go past Bedford back up a few miles north of Bedford, you get a steep decline in values. So it becomes uneconomical for us as a London builder with slightly higher overheads and costs to build north of Bedford. We can't win the land because we are competing with builders from Peterborough, Lincolnshire and Leicestershire whose overheads are much lower.

So in the view of this interviewee there are substantially reduced financial rewards for developing north of Bedford. Rather than a total ban on development in the more remote or exclusive villages, a long serving county councillor argued that while the majority of developers avoided the small villages and concentrated their efforts on sites more likely to be designated for planning permission, a few still tried to gain planning permission in these villages:

> I mean its fairly obvious it would be difficult to build in Woburn or Aspley Heath or somewhere like that, not impossible but difficult and

> builders will know that there is land becoming available in Elstow and various other places but I don't think there are any obvious no go areas. One or two builders would think, well, I could put in a very high class property in Aspley Heath, I have got one plot of land and they do that. Get a big profit on that.

Similarly a district council officer in South Bedfordshire argued that developers did not really try and submit planning applications for new housing in the green belt other than the one-off small developments described above

> AC: But do they still try and put applications [in the green belt] in anyway?
> Interviewee: Not really. We get a house here and there, we don't get sort of big housing developers saying OK, we want a big bit of countryside, and obviously they object to those areas as far as the Local Plan is concerned...I think we have been very robust in our defence of the green belt. We don't generally have big planning applications coming in because they know they're going to get turned down.

This is also the view of regional government officials and of builders themselves. As one regional government official expressed it:

> From personal experience the majority of applications are on land that is developed, allocated for development or immediately adjoining that and I'm sure there are statistical analyses that show that a small minority of applications are on non-allocated sites.

There was also some support for this view from the builders themselves:

> We prefer to work along with the planners, we would rather buy land that has planning consent or on which we are likely to get planning consent. So we would rather have a positive feedback from planners these days rather than say, right well we think that's fine, we are going to fight you on it. (Medium sized regional company)

In addition to planning reasons builders also expressed strong commercial reasons for building in or near existing settlements rather than in open countryside. Encapsulating the builders' viewpoint, a different medium sized regional housing company expressed strong commercial preferences for developing near existing settlements:

> There is an expression in the house building industry, you keep building near the chimney pots, which means you tend to go if you are a biggish builder, you tend to go where the towns are. You shy away from the villages because you sell more houses quickly where there is a large conurbation of people.

Similarly a volume builder explained how they selected greenfield sites:

> You can look at the main transport corridors, if you looked at a map and you plotted on the M25 and the A1 and the M11 and the main towns off those transport corridors, those are the main towns we would target. We

> do as a company tend to stick to the main towns. There is no reason to go to the more risky rural areas.

So according to developers themselves, house builders by and large accept development patterns set in the local planning process and do not apply for sites viewed unfavourably by the local council. There is also evidence from developers that, regardless of pressure from local government or environmental groups, they choose to put in applications in or close to existing settlements for financial reasons.

The contrast in interviewees views between those who held that development was largely unconstrained by any environment or planning considerations and those who felt developers did modify their behaviour could be explained in two ways that make both views partially correct. Firstly, environmental groups respond to development pressure. The smaller ad hoc groups contact established groups for advice and groups tend to form and persist in areas facing development pressure. Both established and ad hoc groups were therefore largely unaware of situations where there was almost no development, particularly in the north of the county. Secondly, when land is allocated for development any designation preventing development, particularly a green belt, is often removed at an early stage in the process. Hence, the green belt boundary is moved, commonly at the Local Plan enquiry stage and land is then allocated for development. In the south of the county the view held by officers was that while developers mainly accepted the current green belt boundary they were aware of larger developers preparing evidence for the next plan enquiry trying to take land out of the green belt for development.

> I think we have been very robust in our defence of the green belt, with housing figures and things, and like I said we are looking...there are no exceptional circumstances to have a review of the green belt now. But all the big guns [volume builders] are just sat around pointing at us for the next green belt review...but going back to the point we don't generally get big planning applications come in because they know they are going to get turned down. (south Bedfordshire officer)

This view mirrors that found among the medium sized and larger house builders themselves who regularly engaged in the local planning process, focusing their efforts on working within the local plan framework getting their sites re-allocated in the local plan as suitable sites for development

> AC Do you try and get policies changed or are you just specifically looking at certain sites when you comment on strategic planning documents?

> Interviewee If it's a policy that deals with a particular site then we may do um some broader issues, its very much homed in towards a particular site so if a particular site, greenbelt or strategic gap or something like you obviously make comments in the local plan saying the strategic gap should be reviewed or the greenbelt should be reviewed, this is why and particularly this location. I will comment on the issues paper just sort of 'I've got these sites and I'm promoting these sites'. But then as it gets through to sort of deposit stage it then becomes very much more homed in on 'I've got these sites I need to promote these sites, what policies do I need to actually object to specifically'. (Medium sized house builder focusing on larger properties).

And similarly a volume builder described the firm's focus on obtaining permission through the local plan enquiry stage rather than submitting applications that contravened the local plan

> As I've said most of the land we've got in Bedfordshire is strategic sites, that we have held for 10 years for example. The local plan is handed by our developments team and the region buys them as they get their planning consent. They will all be pursued at the same speed really, I mean it would be very unusual for us to acquire two sites that were competing against each other in say the local plan. If you had one potential allocation in one village for example it would be very unusual to obtain any other land in that village, because you have obviously homed in on, its sort of always on the fringes of villages and towns, within the ring roads, where ring roads and bypasses have been built.

If this process is successful it means that when developers apply for planning permission they are doing so on land allocated for development. This land may still be viewed by environmental groups as part of the green belt, but technically this is no longer the case. Despite the views of some interviewees that developers would build anywhere there is variation in development pressure across the county. From this evidence we can perhaps identify a typology of development pressure:

1. Isolated north Bedfordshire villages, which are subject to a development that involves a very limited number of exclusive, usually one-off houses.
2. Marston Vale, which has seen an increase in development pressure but where demand for housing is still affected by its industrial past.
3. Green belt villages close to Luton and Leighton Buzzard, where intense development pressure is currently contained by the green belt designation, with developer efforts focused on moving the green belt boundaries rather than submitting applications within the green belt that are unlikely to succeed.
4. Areas of intense development pressure, which include Sandy, Biggleswade and villages close to Bedford, which are the only part of the county to have seen developments of hundreds of dwellings during the study period.

5. The larger villages in Mid Bedfordshire and north Bedfordshire, which have been identified by planners as having the capacity to expand as they have a reasonable range of facilities and an adequate transport infrastructure. These villages typically see proposals for 30-50 dwellings per year.

The Environment for Builders in Bedfordshire

Information about the structure of companies that operate in Bedfordshire emerged from a mail out to builders and interview material. In addition to which, in 1996, Business Link in Bedfordshire carried out a survey of all the construction and building firms operating in Bedfordshire (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 7th July 1996). Their research found that almost 15,000 people were employed in the construction industry, nearly 10% of the total workforce. This workforce was divided up between 1,053 companies, 800 of which employed four or less people. One of the most significant findings was the near disappearance of very small or 'micro' builders from the new build activity sphere. Over thirty companies in this group were contacted as part of this study and nine replies were obtained, in writing, by email and in follow-up telephone conversations. From these contacts the consistent message was that their owners had retired (in two instances) or withdrawn from new build work in order to focus on renovations and conversions (seven instances) because they said they found the environment for new build too competitive, particularly the acquisition of sites. This situation was corroborated by contacting builder members of the Association of Environmentally Conscious Builders who operated in Bedfordshire. This revealed that all their members carried out renovations and conversions, with none engaged in new build. The vast majority of the 800 companies with less than four employees identified by Business Link were not involved in new build. However, it was not only very small builders who found the housing market in Bedfordshire too competitive. One smaller builder, who constructed about 30 dwellings per year found they could not compete with larger, market price developers for sites in villages

"Some of the villages are pointless looking at because if a small parcel of land comes up, unless its identified as social housing by the local authority, say under a section 106 agreement you know its so expensive that again you just can't afford the cost."

Even some larger regional companies reported that they were finding the Bedfordshire housing market a very competitive one, that they saw as being

dominated by national companies. As an example of the competitiveness that builders reported for the Bedfordshire housing market, a medium-sized Bedfordshire-based company with a regional sphere of operations, which has built 250 houses a year in the recent past, had shifted over the last 3-4 years more toward office and commercial development rather than expanding its house building operations. This picture of building companies not finding the Bedfordshire housing market that easy to operate in is backed by research by the Training and Enterprise Council in Bedfordshire, which was published in July 1996 (*Bedfordshire on Sunday*,7th July 1996). This reported that 56% of building companies in the county had experienced cash flow problems in the past two years, although this survey did include builder's suppliers and contractors, like electricians and plumbers, as well as those who carry out extensions and new build. Even so, the message that the operating environment is not an easy one for smaller builders is certainly consistent with reports from interviewees, who were well aware of the decline in micro-builders, as captured by the comments of a chair of one district council planning committee:

> AC: What about the micro-builders, companies who build two or ten houses per year?
>
> Interviewee: There are very few of those around, very few. I mean the trouble is [that] the land has been bought up by the larger developers and even for building 300 houses a year or something, no.

This view was widely recognised. As another district councillor, who until recently lectured in building and decorating at a college in Bedfordshire, made clear:

> The quality of the ones [small builders] I know are excellent, we've got some good small builders, though I have the impression it's a shrinking field. Well one main reason is that you don't get the apprenticeships. I mean you used to be going to college, I mean I was lecturing at..... and we didn't get many builder decorators, not to sound sexist but we just didn't get the lads come along, it's hard work for them. Maybe because they're not encouraged along those lines at school, are they, regardless of ability they're all encouraged to do academic subjects, to which most of them aren't suited.

Similarly an interviewee from the CPRE, who had been campaigning in Bedfordshire for over 20 years, summarised the situation for smaller companies as one in which: "Local builders, small builders do an awful lot of extensions and that kind of work and the odd house."

Without micro-builders involved in new build, this left three groups of builders of new homes. Some smaller builders erected around 30-50 dwellings per year. Medium-

sized, regional companies tended to construct about 300 houses a year, while the volume builders, who generally operated at a national scale, with uneven interventions in Bedfordshire across years, had an annual average new-build rate of closer to 6,000 dwellings a year nationally. The volume builders were organisationally split into their regional offices, some with considerable degrees of autonomy, with perhaps 500-600 new houses built each year in a region, making them structurally similar in some ways to the regional companies. Some of these regional structures reflected take-over by a national company of a regional company that already operated in an area. This is significant because it could provide an explanation as to why volume builders often had much in common with medium-sized regional residential builders.

So does the size of company affect the approach of builders to incorporating environmental standards into their new build work. For some interviewees, it was inappropriate to compare the environmental performance of large and small builders? These views are illustrated in the following statement from a senior planning officer in a district council:

> They are different kinds of operator. They do different kinds of schemes. Big, volume builders do big, volume schemes. Local builders do local schemes. It's apples and oranges. They are just different positions. Smaller schemes obviously don't require the same things as larger schemes. Larger schemes can sustain contributions to this, that and the other. If you've got a little cul-de-sac of five houses, you're looking at doing a good tidy job and that's about all....Of course there are issues [on which] everybody's got to satisfy the [local] authority. The access has got to be right. Everybody's got to satisfy the development control people in terms of producing, in design terms, producing, it's just as valid for five houses to be well designed as 500 houses. So all those things apply but they are just different animals I would say.

Despite arguing that they are different types of operator, this interviewee offers a somewhat contradictory message, by arguing that there are things they have in common. However, while it may be harder for smaller developers to include large-scale features on their sites, such as large scale habitat creation schemes, sustainable drainage systems or public transport infrastructure, there is still much they can do in the design and, to an extent, the layout of individual houses, as discussed in detail in Chapter Three. At the start of the research it was considered that the scale of development could be one factor that influenced the environmental standards

included. It was found during the research that the size of development could not be considered as a separate factor from the size of the developer so these factors are therefore not considered separately.

As for the general view on differences in operations, about two-thirds of interviewees argued that larger companies took environmental concerns more seriously than smaller building firms. The general messages here are exemplified in the views of a paid employee in a countryside management group, who spent much of his time responding to planning applications and strategic plans:

> Well I think the, I mean obviously they [large companies] consider their image, so for housing from a PR point of view they want to display clean credentials, both locally and nationally as well....and they have got their house in order in terms of satisfying all sort of environmental concerns and perhaps good practice... they've linked up with environmental organisations. There's been a longer association between environmental organisations like the RSPB... Wildlife Trust and the big operators, um, you know they recognise that a lot the after uses actually have net gains for the environment.

The sentiments here expressed common views, with the rationale offered by most interviewees for differences being encapsulated in the comments of a journalist: "I guess the larger ones should be more concerned [about the environment] because they have more to lose publicity-wise". Another factor that may lead to more favourable responses by larger companies was raised by several interviewees, who argued that they could afford to buy-in more expertise: "... the big boys can afford consultants in lots of different fields. I mean they will have a consultant perhaps for landscaping, another consultant for ecology and another consultant for highways, you know" (CPRE interviewee).

For other interviewees differences owed more to the practical consideration that it was simply harder for smaller builders to achieve high environmental standards because they were confined to smaller sites:

> I think they [smaller builders] are limited in what they can achieve. The smaller schemes are limited by what they can achieve in terms of environmental enhancement. It's harder for them. (Regional government agency official)

Adding more substance to this explanation, one local MP held that:

> Well the smaller ones have less ability to implement it [high environmental standards]. Even if they would be constrained by the site and the budget and all that, so if they could do little things that we obviously don't notice, how they deal with top soil and that kind of thing, for example. And maybe you know, looking after some hedgerow or other that might be left over rather than knocking it down....so maybe those little things happen, but I now think it's strong on the list of priorities for small building firms. In a sense it would be difficult for them to do that. I'm not saying they shouldn't, but it's the big ones that, you know, those that get commissioned to take great chunks of countryside or rural land, but they are the ones that have got the opportunity to make more of a difference.

Several interviewees also argued that local developers faced greater constraints than national companies. As an employee from an environmental group, who spent much of her time on planning issues, expressed it:

> They [builders] dislike having things delayed and local developers, I think, are probably about the same, if not worse, in some cases 'cause they have even tighter deadlines. If you've got houses all over the country you might have a little more margin for negotiating than someone who is dependent on a few schemes for their livelihood.

This interviewee was viewing delays in terms of protected species, such as badgers or newts being found on the site, but delays in planning or designing environmental features could relate to wider issues than biodiversity.

One might expect local developers to show greater sensitivity to locally important issues, although interviewees were more inclined to hold that this characteristic was not displayed by local companies. This point is well exemplified by an interviewee from a direct action environmental pressure group, who was speaking about a specific small local building company:

> He tends to try and be a big player but it has caught him out a few times. He has built some much bigger houses. He wanted the old school site, which is on the main roundabout. He raised the old Victorian school to the ground before they could stop him because it had no conservation stuff on it. But there were trees and the trees got saved but the site we wanted. We wanted it as a small museum or a new library and I suggested an eco-centre and all sorts of really good ideas. But he flattened it and now they won't give him planning permission. He wanted to build lots of flats or houses but there are a lot of issues to do with transport so they won't let him.

This example of a local developer being caught out by not correctly judging the local political climate correctly was just one of a number of examples of questionable local builder action. Indicating the feelings these actions can arouse, one chair of a district council planning committee insisted that I turn the tape recorder off while she heavily criticised the conduct of local house building companies. Amongst interviewees who were not builders, there was a general consensus, that local house builders could not be trusted to behave positively toward environmental improvements. This view was caught by a spokesperson from Friends of the Earth, who was very negative about the role of small developers in Bedfordshire:

> ... certainly they [smaller builders] are as bad as large developers and if you add them all together they could be worse, because they could be the ones taking all the little bits of greenness that you don't have time to object to but you end up with just a wall of concrete.

That noted, in terms of smaller local companies, several interviewees pointed out that they were not necessarily the same thing. As one journalist commented:

> Because they are smaller companies they are not necessarily local. Because when I say local, I think of people who actually live in Bedford, that are going to, like with us, if we did something wrong people would be in our downstairs office and we wouldn't get out of it and [they] will harass us... if you tell somebody in Bedford that there is a local company building a housing estate in Bedford, but they are actually from Luton, then they would say well they are not local. And so in that way, no they don't have the constraints of sort of working side-by-side.

There was, however, a minority view that smaller builders were more likely to take some environmental issues, especially design, more seriously. The following illustrative quote is from a CPRE spokesperson:

> ... the smaller local developer, local builder, is much more likely to be sympathetic visually, I think in design to the character of the area, than the volume house builder. I think that's because of mass production versus smaller intimate designs, so really that's one thing.

This point was also raised by a town preservation society, but this time put a little less strongly:

> I think the small local companies... I think the developments are a bit more sympathetic to the area. There is a tendency for big developers to come in and build the same thing all over the county. But generally speaking I wouldn't say there is much in it.

This view was endorsed by some of the councillors I interviewed, as the following quote from a district councillor of seven years illustrates: "Only that the small ones

because they have to work in the local areas, can't do anything horrendously dire." As does the views of a County Councillor of nearly thirty years experience:

> I just think sometimes that the small builders do a better job. They have a much smaller area to do than volume builders. They [volume builders] are the lowest common denominator. They are satisfying more of a mass market.

Summarising the dominant tone amongst those who thought small builders offered a superior environmental package, a spokesperson from a regional government agency argued that smaller local firms are conscious that they have to live with the consequences of their actions: "I would certainly know of a number of local builders who can look back to pre-war buildings and say, we built that. And they have got to live with what they do."

Yet most of the positive comments that were made about smaller builders were related to issues of design and quality of the workmanship, so they only incorporate a narrow range of environmental issues. Indeed, only three interviewees argued on a broader front that smaller builders were better than larger companies (one from a village society and the other two from regional government agencies), with these two commenting on positive experiences with smaller builders on energy issues, whereas they had experienced a lack of progress with volume builders. The third set of broader supportive comments came from a representative of a specialist wildlife group:

> I think it is the volume builders where they have really got to start looking at because I've seen cases where some of the smaller builders are thinking about energy approaches etcetera. It's just a handful of people I've seen that are taking it on board but I still think there is a bigger role for the volume builders to play and they are just thinking about the money in their pocket.... There are some smaller builders that are specialists. Smaller ones might be prepared to raise environmental quality, partly they think [that if] they can showcase examples, they may win more jobs. They may win more jobs. It's niche markets. Don't see it with volume builders.

This view that some small builders are taking action which is not a feature amongst volume builders was partially endorsed by local media reporting. Here the property pages and 'soft' news stories often carried items about housing close to completion or houses being sold. However, only one of these ever mentioned environmental features, and this from five years of newspaper coverage. The development was carried out by a small Leighton Buzzard builder, Logan Homes. The item on this development promoted all the features usually mentioned when developments are

covered, such as fitted kitchens and bathrooms, but additionally promoted the development's environmental benefits, including houses being very close to the farmers market, high standards of insulation and energy efficient gas boilers (*Leighton Buzzard Observer* 12th December 2000). But while such 'promotional' newspaper reports might be read with a pinch of salt, the reports of those interviewees who held more positive views on small firms did at least draw on personal or institutional experience. As one of the wildlife groups pointed out, they had found a responsible attitude amongst smaller local suppliers compared to national companies with timber supply and construction:

> Interviewee: I guess we have a good relationship with certain smaller companies who we kind of know and trust and get on with quite well. We know that company ... if they find signs of bats they will always tell us. They will always give us lots of time to do something about it. Whereas I don't think we've had that relationship with some of the bigger companies. The good relationships that we have developed have tended to be with the smaller companies.
> AC: Can you think of any examples of that?
> Interviewee: The timber treatment companies, there is a company called, erm, Bedford Timber Preservation. Which, um,.... the guy has done quite a bit of work with us to recognise bat signs and regularly we get information from them. Whereas a company like Rentokill, for example, they'll never contact us. It's inevitable, they must be coming across bat roosts and simply just not letting us know. We have written to them and said 'look, this is what we do, this is what the legislation is', and we've had nothing from them.

Similarly favourable responses were obtained from one of the village societies, whose representative commented on the much more responsible approach taken by local builders to site selection:

> Smaller developers employ builders who are local and local builders take much more of an interest in what happens... I think it is a fact that the smaller developers we see over the longer term are local people who have lived here for some time and take an interest. The big people, like Huntingate,... build what they want to. Actually that could be a disadvantage because they plough up drains, field drains and then you can tell them that the land will actually flood unless the drains are put down. Next year people bought the houses and were knee deep in water because the rains came. They [larger builders] have no interest in local nature, whereas the local builder... he will know what is there. He will maintain it.

But this was the only interviewee who argued that there is greater sensitivity and an environmental advantage derived from the local knowledge held by local builders. This indicates that this is not a widespread perception within Bedfordshire. Indeed,

the evidence for positive action by smaller local developers appears inconclusive at best, perhaps beyond sensitivity on the part of a few local developers to design issues and to operating with high standards in particular local circumstances. So, in conclusion, there did not appear to be a strong link between builder size and environmental performance.

Environmental Pressures on Builders from Government

Yet there were pressures on builders to integrate environmental considerations more fully into their development proposals. Developers themselves made this clear, when they brought into highlight pressure from government as a reason to build to higher environmental standards. However, in terms of accepting this pressure, developers appeared to be in a strong position compared to local government in Bedfordshire and were willing to withdraw promised environmental benefits if their requirements were not met. There were also signs that an active bargaining process was operating, with developers trading environmental measures against things they wanted from the council in seeking planning permission. A good example of this 'horse – trading' occurred for a small site at Henlow, called Northfield Farm. Here the developers Taywood Homes initially promised a new graveyard for the village, a garden of remembrance, public open space, a Millennium sculpture for the village and to plant an avenue of trees leading up to the church. This seemed a substantial development gain for a development of this scale. But Taywood claimed they would not have the money for these community projects if they were forced to build fewer houses (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 31st March 2000). Consequently, these offers of community facilities were withdrawn when the district council tried to reduce the number of houses that was to be built on the site from 15 to 10. The planning debate continued and by the end of the study period the development had not taken place. Across a broader canvass, it is noteworthy that the examples that were given by interviewed developers of them carrying out work to higher environmental standards, as a result of local government pressure, were all away from Bedfordshire. The kinds of messages given about these other places are all the more poignant because they were not readily forthcoming in a Bedfordshire setting.

> At a place called Overton in Hants they [the district council] wanted a whole list of environmental improvements to whoever won the estate and

you had to guarantee that you would build those improvements into the scheme. And it included the usual preferably timber framed, preferably with timber windows, timber windows in particular has a big.... although environmentally friendly people want wood windows, 90% of the population want PVC because it's easy to clean and you don't have to paint it every two years. So there were those sorts of things, super insulated so the running costs were very low. Drainage systems that re-used grey water and such and so forth. Solar panels, k glass, do you know what k glass is? It lets the heat in one way but doesn't let it out again. (Medium-sized regional company based in London)

This kind of message is important, because it shows that at least some developers are aware or have been made aware by local authorities of the kind of measures they needed to take to build to higher environmental standards. Yet companies made clear that financial decisions to build to these higher standards were taken where it was required to secure planning permission but they chose not to build to these standards where it was not. Here the literature provides some examples of developers resisting efforts by local government to incorporate higher standards. Farthing (1995) who identified the paradoxical situation of developers appearing at one session of the public inquiry into the local plan to support the local authority strategy over the release of land and at a later session in the enquiry appearing as objectors, unhappy about the level of open space and community facilities the local council required of them.

A broader point to take from such messages is inertia, conservatism and lack of knowledge in the building industry may be significant, although the fact that builders can develop to these higher standards when they feel this is required illustrates these are not overriding factors. Note the tone recorded in discussion of another development that 'required' higher environmental standards, this time from a slightly smaller regionally-based company in Northamptonshire.

> Development in Milton Keynes working with English Partnerships has really brought it [the environment] to the forefront because they are able to control that side of the development so such that, yes, we have been, I suppose, at new techniques and meeting sort NHER criteria and that type of thing in the EcoHomes criteria.

This interviewee's evidence is endorsed by media reporting of the issue, with a different house builder based in Bedfordshire, Admiral Homes, winning a national award for energy efficiency on an estate it built in Milton Keynes (*Dunstable Gazette* 26th April 1995). Yet there were no examples of environmental awards or commendations for housing developments in Bedfordshire. Yet it is significant that

interviews and media reports show that where builders are pressed to build to higher standards, whether by a government quango (as in the case of Milton Keynes) or a local authority, they are willing to do so. This should not be read to mean that building companies were enthusiastic about adopting higher environmental standards, as illustrated by the views of a London-based interviewee, who expressed reservations about the process:

> I'm thinking of somewhere like Milton Keynes, where you have got English Partnerships to work with. We wouldn't go for everything in Milton Keynes because it's actually quite a difficult, drawn-out process bidding for the land, because of the kind of body that they are in terms of the stages they want you to progress through, it's actually quite an expensive process to go through.

This suggests that while developers may sometimes be willing to engage in the extra work involved in building to a higher standard, rather than simply working to business as usual, they are reluctant to do so for the majority of their sites because of the extra work involved. Hence, developers adopted different tactics to respond to pressure from government over environmental measures.

Two possible approaches were reported to be open to developers in this regard, with both captured in the commentary from an employee in an environmental group:

> If you read an environmental statement they [developers] generally try and give weight to all of those. I think developers flag up environmental considerations, whether it be noise or water or whatever. You always get developers who would much rather there wasn't anything of interest so they don't have any problems going ahead with whatever and might play down the information they have gathered from other sources. Others are ever so keen and will flag everything up and say, 'oh we are doing this for the benefit of this species and our planting scheme will complement this, that and the other. So it does vary a great deal.

But what is clear from the builder interviews undertaken is that even the same developer may adopt these two tactics simultaneously, on different sites; in some instances promoting their green credentials, in others playing down environmental concerns and building their standard product. One of a number of explorations in interviews of the uneven willingness of developers to build to high standards occurred during discussion with a local Bedford architect:

> Interviewee: I think building is a trade [that] doesn't have to bother about the pound at the end. And of course going up to Cambridge, because of necessity you have got a better group of builders and developers, because they know when they come in that they have got to do something special. But Bedford is so tatty, and they allow it to get tatty, the High Street is

full of public houses. People are frightened to death to walk up the road after eight o'clock.
A: Do the same builders do more environmental stuff in Cambridge and less in Bedford.
Interviewee: Yes and you see they are going to make more money in Cambridge or Oxford or London.

The view that builders are not particularly concerned about the quality of their finished product in Bedfordshire is one that came through in a number of interviews. Seen from this perspective, builders in Bedfordshire can sell whatever they put up (and get planning permission for the same), so there is no point in building to higher quality as this would not yield financial rewards. In this regard Bedfordshire is seen to be quite different from more 'prestigious' locations like Cambridge. This reflects findings by Adams and May (1992) who assessed the land owner (including builder) influence in local plan making. They found that in Cambridge, at the slightest hint of controversy or public protest the county council adopted a protectionist line. The absence of political stability in Cambridge heightened the public nature of the decision making and exposed local politicians to pressure from their electorates. Also as Monk and associates (1996) and a number of interviewees make clear with regard to Cambridge and the rural district of South Cambridgeshire, where planning restrictions are tight, developers have certain expectations about an area before they submit a planning application. They know that for places like Cambridge, tight planning restraint is strengthened by the very high architectural quality of the city centre, by affluence of the population, by significant numbers of Green Party councillors and by high land prices, so that high standards of development are expected from the outset by local government and buyers. Much as with Fenland, which receives lower quality spill-over housing from Cambridge and its immediate surrounds (Monk and associates, 1996), even those in the building industry report that Bedfordshire is not a location in which there is development control or housing market pressure to build above minimum standards.

Other sources of pressure and influence on house builders

But pressure on builders could come through other channels within the building industry, including trade bodies, the need for larger companies to satisfy shareholders and from bodies set up to promote green building, such as the Building Research Establishment (BRE). At the end of the interview process for this thesis, however, the

conclusion that had to be reached is that institutions like the Building Research Establishment were considered to have an insignificant impact on builder action by interviewees. Even though two interviewees did mention standards set by BRE, the relevance of these standards only arose because they were raised by local government or a government quango as part of the conditions attached to developing a particular site. Significantly here, no builder mentioned the BRE, or any other charitable or government supported organisation involved with energy efficiency or green building, as having provided advice that was a significant source of information to them. This is despite the fact that builders use of the BRE certification outside Bedfordshire, at the recommendation of local authorities (as signified by the Hampshire example cited earlier). Indeed, only one interviewed builder in Bedfordshire had used Ecohomes (Ecohomes is the Building Research Establishment green building certification scheme.). This builder had only done this at the recommendation of a client, which was a housing association. For this builder, the fees paid to the BRE are a waste of money, and he objected to his scheme gaining or losing points for features that he regarded as being outside his control:

> It is, yes, it's the EcoHomes. And I have to say, it's the biggest waste of money. You pay a fee to a government organisation, you then get an outside company or practice to put together what they call your rate and you get a certificate at the end of the day. But you can do other things to get away from it. You get bonus points if you use a brownfield site, and it is so... so, you know you can make the points if you want. At the end of the day they get the certificate, the housing association, and they did in this case because they get extra funding for them. Again back to money, desperate housing associations, they definitely need the certificate, they reason they need it is because they get the money.

For builders in Bedfordshire the EcoHomes scheme has some way to go if it is to win their confidence to use it in their standard products.

But this does not mean that builders operate in an environment without pressure on them over housing standards and environmental concerns. For instance, apart from recognised impacts from local authorities, one of the volume builders identified three main sources of pressure facing his company:

> I would say it [pressure for higher environmental standards] comes from shareholders wanting to improve the company, building regulations which come through government... It is becoming more and more important for coping generally be sustainable and have sustainable practices. I think that's going to be very important for the future. That will be shareholder pressure and customer pressure.

Add to this the fact that all the builder interviewees highlighted the importance of suppliers in providing them with information about new products and services. At the start of the research this important role of suppliers had not been fully considered. But this did come through as a key potential for favouring more environmentally positive house building. As one medium-sized regional company, that operates in the more expensive section of the market, made clear as regards the source of new information received on environmental enhancements, this comes:

> Normally via our technical department, we are approached by a lot of brick companies, materials companies and so on because of the nature of our business that we are doing so its probably from outside people approaching us.

Another regional company, that produces a more mixed 'quality' output, similarly identified suppliers as the single most important source for new information: "Our buyers are in touch with all the companies they buy from and they constantly tell you about new products". Suppliers also seemed to have a strong influence in promoting their products at seminars run for the building industry by company associations.

> [The] NHBC will hold a few seminars on various subjects and you will have a coffee room where there will be six or eight suppliers displaying their wares and trying to persuade you they are the best.

Suppliers are also highlighted as an important source of innovation in the literature. Gann (1997) argues that house builders have benefited from innovations in material and component suppliers that were initially targeted at other industries. A potential problem here is that suppliers have a vested interest in selling their product and may make false or exaggerated claims about the environmental benefits of their products. One of the most striking examples of this appeared in an interview with a volume builder who promoted the environmental benefits of electric Economy Seven heating and PVC windows. This runs contrary to all the published advice with regard to gas

central heating, which points in particular to condensing boilers as the most efficient conventional heating sources (BRE, 2001). The standard assessment procedure (SAP) described in Chapter Three gives a SAP rating of 98 for condensing gas boilers but only 70 for a well insulated electric storage boiler, with secondary electric panel heating (in the SAP system 1 is very poor and 120 is very good). Similarly as discussed in Chapter Three, environmentalists and independent assessment of PVC have expressed concern about a product that causes considerable environmental damage to make and that cannot easily be recycled. The importance of this point is particularly significant, given the tendency for builders to state that it is their building suppliers who are their main source of information on environmental improvements. In this context, it is always possible that builders think they are making environmental enhancements, when evidence suggests that a more environmentally-friendly, and possibly equally cost-effective, solution is available.

Following this line of thought, interviewees also explored other means by which builders find out about environmental improvements they could implement, as well as investigating the circumstances under which builders might be willing to complete developments to higher environmental standards. In this regard, the important role of an environmental champion within a company was highlighted. This role of environmental champions in British business remains an under researched area. One notable exception is work by Walley and Stubs (2000), who use the analogy of termites to describe the role of environmental champions. On the one hand the termite analogy suggest lots of individual actions can make a big difference, a common theme in the environment movement. On the other the environmental champion could be seen as undermining the organisation they work for, another role of termites. In the Bedfordshire context, drawing on experience with a variety of companies, one regional government official was positive about the potential for such champions.

> I mean occasionally you will have a champion, a visionary in companies, not just building companies, any companies, some of them will have [a] champion or visionary who really, really, wants to make a difference and is sufficiently powerful to be able to say, 'it will be done'. But I have to say, whenever I have seen that happen, it also brought business benefits to that company, but very often in the medium to long-term rather than the short-term.

That said, while the potential for such champions was recognised by various interviewees, amongst the building companies that were interviewed for this study,

only one example of an environmental champion operating within a firm was identified (a medium-sized company that carried out building work for housing associations). This company was the only one in this study that had a sustainability unit. This unit provided support and information, and occasionally pressured other sections of the company, over environmentally sustainable action. As an illustration, one issue the sustainability unit was championing was the phasing out of PVC windows by the refurbishment section of the company. This is despite the fact that the refurbishment section preferred PVC windows, because of their lower maintenance requirements, whereas the sustainability unit was concerned about the environmental damage they cause. So environmental champions are potential sources of influence, and the views of interviewees who had a broad knowledge of the building industry (significantly including beyond Bedfordshire) did recognise that environmental champions did operate within the sector. Yet, in terms of what was happening in Bedfordshire itself, only this one example of this practice was recorded.

As for trade bodies, their role in raising environmental standards came across as very limited. This is despite the fact that all builders were members of a trade organisation, with the National House Building Council and House Builders Federation being the most popular with the larger builders. Smaller builders were more commonly members of the Federation of Master Builders But while these organisations have produced reports nationally, and organised seminars and conferences, that link housing and environmental issues, these were not raised by interviewees, even when pressed on the issue. Perhaps this is more surprising for larger firms than for smaller ones, for as a small Bedfordshire-based company, that built about 30 houses a year, complained, while they were interested in this material, with just two full-time staff, it was hard to make the time for these events or pay for them. Reflecting a general message for small firms (in particular), the representative from this firm indicated that company officers only go to events that are essential for the business, which mainly means that attendance is restricted to health and safety issues. Given the climate for house building in Bedfordshire, there is no sense of urgency over the significance of embedding stronger environmental awareness into the actions of building companies.

Environmental Priorities for house builders

None of this means that builders did not recognise the importance and pertinence of certain environmental issues. In this regard, three main issues stand apart, on the basis of the frequency and intensity with which they were mentioned in interviews. These were decisions over brownfield or greenfield site development, the potentialities for nature conservation given house building, and the management of the building process to lessen environmental damage.

Location – Greenfield Versus Brownfield

As recognised in PPG3, one of the primary ways in which the house building industry can (potentially) mitigate the impact of new housing development is to place new build on brownfield sites. The shift from greenfield to brownfield sites is one area where consideration has been given to the use of fiscal measures in the form of a greenfield tax rather than a regulatory approach currently employed by the land use planning system, an approach more in keeping with ecological modernisation. However, doubts on the effectiveness of a greenfield tax approach have been expressed by Bramley (1998) who modelled the effect of a greenfield tax at 30% and compared it to land use planning measures such as allocating more housing development to existing urban areas. He found that traditional planning approaches worked better in terms of development on brownfield sites and did not push up house prices to the same degree as a green field tax. There has been a reluctance on the part of government to extend the range and number of green taxes in Britain and so far a greenfield tax remains to be implemented. It is certainly the case that environmental issues associated with greenfield versus brownfield development is an important issue in the minds of developers in terms of their location decisions. Yet, in spite of environmental objections, developers hold a strong attraction for building on greenfield sites, as one of the volume builders explained:

> Greenfield sites gives you much more flexibility in design and lay out, how you want it to be, in terms of a master plan, whereas a brownfield site is often constrained by what is already on the site and [what is] surrounded by the site, overlooking issues or access or whatever it may be. So with brownfield you are sort of forced to go down a particular

> route, whereas greenfield, you can really sort of shine on your layouts on the greenfield sites... We certainly aren't put off at all by brownfield and most of our portfolio is brownfield at the moment but they do take up a lot of management time and they are harder to develop.

So although this developer carried out a lot of brownfield work, his company still has a preference for greenfield sites. Offering a further explanation for this preference, another issue raised by a volume builder was the marketing advantages of greenfield sites:

> It [greenfield] also helps with the sort of image that you are trying to create. If it's more than, if you have only got 10-20 houses, its quite hard to create an image for that particular site, whereas if you have got 500 houses then you can create a location and an address. For example, we have got a site in a village in, near Chelmsford, which is for 700 units and you are able over the years to create a particular image and brand for that site, whereas if you are pursuing a brownfield site they are normally very much smaller, for example 25 flats of something.

This idea of creating identities for greenfield development is explored by Perkins (1989) who describes how developers are involved in building houses that simultaneously perpetuate and undermine a rural environment in the case study town of Chapel Hill. Local and corporate housing developers advertise their new residential developments in ways which are consistent with anti-urban sentiment. This is particularly evident in the names chosen for new development with the majority having nostalgic or diminutive names. Some of the features in the advertisements were removed by the proposals named after them, for example, Franklin Woods.

This commercial preference for greenfield sites was echoed by medium-sized regional companies although recognising an advantageous position with regard to gaining planning permission of developing brownfield sites, such companies were aware of sales drawbacks with brownfield sites:

> As a planner, with my planning hat on, I think that developing brownfield sites is good, needs to be done. I think PPG3 came out at the right time. You've obviously got issues like contamination on previously developed sites which is I expect one of the reasons why these sites haven't been

developed. But, as I say, with a planner's hat on, it's forcing house builders to actually go and look at those previously developed sites, re-evaluate them and possibly spend a bit of money to sort out the contamination. From a commercial point of view greenfield is far better, as it would be. You are spending less money, you have got this wonderful greenfield site and it's pretty much, it's also you are hitting demand really, um, a lot of people would prefer to live on housing developments on greenfield sites. They have got a larger garden, they have got a nice big parking space, they have got their sort of low density development. (Developer specialising in 4-5 bedroom detached properties)

Adding further to the potential problems of brownfield sites were the 'dangers' of archaeological finds. Thus, one national developer, whose portfolio was 95% brownfield, noted that the company has been faced with significant archaeological material on a number of occasions, with the result that developments are delayed and costs rise (to a level reported to be higher than that associated with responding to wildlife issues). Hence, while instances were found of support for the principle (and practice) of re-using land, it was also not common to find developers thinking that sometimes housing was not the best solution for such sites, and that some brownfield sites are better kept for commercial or industrial use:

> It's the key thing to do at the moment, but obviously re-using old land is a great idea. But the problem we have, and the thought occurs to me long-term, is if you cover all the old factories and offices with housing, then where do you put the offices and factories. Logically you end up forming new industrial estates, which are never on brown field, usually on greenfield. But on top of that, obviously brown field.... a lot of brownfield sites are heavily contaminated for one reason or another. And that is why a large factory was put on top in the first place to cover it up, and by trying to build houses on top of it you can cause more problems than it's actually worth. All the expense becomes so much that there is no value in the land at all.(Medium-sized regional company)

But this is not the whole story. It did come across strongly for those developers who operated at the more expensive end of the housing market (even if this was not their whole portfolio), but for some companies that did not focus on the more expensive

sections of the market, the sale of mixed price housing was in some cases helped by having a central, brownfield location, even if the basic message that greenfield was preferred on balance was still recorded:

> Well brown field sites from the sales point of view tend to be more central. [But] It's fair to say we would rather build on [a] greenfield site, [for] if you ask the construction people what they really like [it] is a nice flat green field, with services near by but that doesn't really happen very much any more.(Medium-sized regional company)

Of course we also need to be a little careful about what we mean by brownfield and greenfield sites. Both from a survey of local media reports and from interviews, it became clear that there were some grey areas associated with such a binary divide. Take, for example, the following report from *Biggleswade Chronicle* (24th March 2000):

> An MP has enraged villagers in Willington after destroying a precious wildlife habitat. Michael Lord, MP for central Suffolk and North Ipswich began clearing the land he owns behind the village's lower school on Sunday Morning with diggers and bonfires. Despite protests from a 40 strong crowd including Bedford's Mayor Carole Ellis Mr Lord continued on with the work next day.... Sunday's events follow a long row between Mr Lord and Willington over his plans for the land. In December 1998 he was denied permission to build 35 executive homes on it after campaigning by villagers... Police were called and fire fighters attended as the blaze threatened to burn out of control... Tree preservation orders are in force and the area is a county wildlife site.

It should not be assumed then that so-called greenfield sites are pristine environments on which housing developments can only bring deterioration. It has to be recognised that landowners can have a vested interest in the sale of greenfield sites, which can induce changes to the site before any building has even started. Certainly the clear message from various interviewees was that landowners were active agents in seeking to have greenfield sites they own 'adopted' for housing purposes. Illustrative of the sentiments expressed here, one environmental group that is concerned about the expansion of Milton Keyes into Bedfordshire expressed concern about the willingness

of local farmers to sell land to developers: "We have farmers who... will be quite happy to sell out to developers and then they can move to, you name it, the West Indies, and never have to see it again". Identifying a broader implication of this tendency, at the regional government level the view was expressed that the amount of money received by landowners in the development process restricted funding for environmental and other projects that could benefit communities:

> It's often a question of what the available uplift in land value [is] and also at what point the benefit is sought. If the benefit is sought early, before the developer starts negotiating with the landowner, you have got a much better chance of clawing some of that money back for public benefit than if a deal has already been done with the landowner and the landowner is then asked to accept half the value that he thought he was going to get.

This relates to point made in Chapter Seven by a number of interviewees about the need for those pressuring builders, particularly local authority planners, to become involved at an early stage of the development process. This point also relates to the condition in which so-called greenfield sites are made available to developers. Thus, several interviewees pointed to examples of landowners deliberately making their site look dilapidated, so that when a developer applied for planning permission, the applicant could claim that the development would result in an (environmental) improvement to the site. Landowners were also reported to be involved in the deliberate removal of wildlife and archaeological interest from sites, in order to remove potential barriers to planning applications:

> A designated wildlife site dating back to the Bronze Age was ploughed up by a farmer. The field of Luton Road Wilstead is a prime site for development and applications have been received in the past to build 250 and 400 homes... County Ecologist John Comont said 'Grassland of that sort is very rare in Bedfordshire'. The fields are believed to contain rare flowers including cowslips. Chairman of Wilstead Parish Council John Wheeler said 'When we saw the local plan we thought the fields were safe'. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 28th January 1996)

In terms of environmental conditions, therefore, we need to be clear that there are shades of 'greenfield', just as there are shades of 'brown' in previously used sites. It follows that we need to have a somewhat nuanced reading of builder preferences for

greenfield or brownfield development, although the dominant message from the developers angle is clearly that greenfield sites are viewed as being much less likely to pose development problems (assuming planning permission can be obtained).

Yet there is one group of developers who did reveal a different attitude towards brownfield sites. This was that group of developers who worked for housing associations. They had a very different perspective on the balance of advantages and disadvantages for greenfield and brownfield developments. Here there was a real concern that if housing association developments were placed on greenfield sites, then this could result in residents experiencing difficulties in accessing key services. This minority view (given the relatively small number of housing association properties being built) stood in contrast with the main tidal flow, which out of preference would seek to build on greenfield sites most of the time.

Nature Conservation and landscape

When asked about their own environmental priorities, nature conservation emerged as a strong issue for builders. This is backed up by material in the literature which suggests that over a quarter of all planning obligations relate to landscape and open space provision (Ennis, 1996). There are two main aspects to this. Firstly, nature conservation is seen as a positive feature, which enhances the visual appearance of properties and provides a positive marketing tool. Secondly, nature conservation issues are seen to impose significant legal and planning constraints on developers. The marketing aspect of nature conservation was well exemplified by an interview with a medium-sized regional company building that operated at the exclusive end of the housing market:

> I'm thinking of something to do with our sales department actually, sort of conservation of trees. Existing trees that are on the site, that we have sort of built developments around, and so on. We go in quite a lot for Green Leaf Awards where we have gone back in a few years time and you go back and there are mature trees on the site and so on, and they have been protected. That's actually something the purchasers really quite like to see developers doing and that's certainly important to the company.

The importance of market and sales considerations is overt here, with this kind of view echoed by others, who recognised that the appearance of estates was important. As a medium-sized regional company representative recognised: "As builders we can appreciate the value of a substantial tree which gives a good setting for our housing estates". Viewed from the viewpoint of 'mistakes we have made', a national company director criticised a local team that removed a lot of mature trees on one of the company's large sites:

> I actually think if you have a lot of mature trees on site it adds such a lot of value. I had a big sense of humour failure with one of our big sites. When I went down to it there were lots of mature trees and some rather derelict houses. I hadn't appreciated until I saw some before and after shots that they had chopped down a high percentage of the mature trees. You saw the before shots with this mass of trees in it and there was the after with this wonderful development but the one thing you noticed more than anything else was the fact this one had trees in it and this one didn't. In fact they had planted trees in almost identical locations but they were little whips. A big sense of humour failure.

The way in which mature trees can add value to a property and be of potential use to new residents has been identified by Boucher and Whatmore (1993) who found this was a significant issue for housing developers when considering whether to leave part of a site undeveloped. A further example of this marketing approach was given by an employee of an environmental group, who described a joint project between Beazer Homes and English Nature in Leighton Buzzard.

> Beazer and English Nature have been working together to produce houses that have environmentally-friendly gardens, like wildlife gardening... they have built these houses and they have got communal gardens with all the right things, like bird boxes and bat boxes and hedgehog houses for hibernation, wildlife ponds. All the plants and shrubs that you would love to have in your garden and be really attractive for all the invertebrates and butterflies and things, so I think they are trying to prove the biodiversity of their housing development, which is an interesting idea... but it is true to say that certainly gardens are a resource in urban areas that shouldn't be overlooked.

The example above is of particular note because it include the creation of new habitat rather than the conservation of existing nature conservation interest on the site. Beazer is an interesting company in terms of incorporating nature conservation in their development projects, as they have been involved in environmental work to protect species that goes beyond that which is required of them legally:
Frogs and toads in a built up area can now look forward to a longer life span. Amphibians migrating across a busy access road leading to the housing estate at Saxon Gate in Biggleswade, have been able to use a specially constructed tunnel by Beazer Homes. The road has to be crossed in the spring by the adults making their way to a balancing pond to spawn and a month or two later by thousands of offspring making the return trip.... Marcus Philips is chairman of the Bedfordshire Reptile and Amphibian Group and he told the Chronicle 'There is no doubt the tunnel has been a success, the number of toads found dead on the road was significantly down on last year'. Beazer Manager at Stratton Fields, Steve Watson said 'When members of BRAG voiced their concern we were more than happy to oblige. It might sound a strange idea building a toad tunnel but if it means by doing so we can protect the local toad population, then it's a task well worth carrying out'. Beazer Homes action came in a year when across its Bedford operation it planted over 6,000 trees and 5,500 metres of shrubs. (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 15th September 2000)

But despite the positive tone of this commentary, and in the midst of a significant array of positive messages from builders (and certain other commentators) about the potential for nature conservation to be linked to housing developments, there was still an underlying tone of commercial interest in developer concerns about nature conservation. As such, shifts in market conditions could result in such positive colourings becoming paler (or even brighter). Illustrative of this were issues of landscape and open space, which were raised by interviewees as items that developers were ready to incorporate in their building proposals. Signifying the general tone of comments on these issues is a point raised by one of the countryside management NGOs, who spend a considerable amount of time trying to persuade all kinds of developers, including housing developers, gravel companies and commercial property developers, to contribute to habitat creation schemes:

> They tend to be happier providing things where they feel there's going to be some advantage to them in terms of marketing the development, so things like the basic structural landscape, or if open space was an issue. Where there is more reluctance is if you're looking for some sort of off-site relationship.

This coincides with the findings of Ennis (1996) who found that developers were reluctant to pay for off site features and demanded that local authorities provide detailed justification for the off site features. The importance of commercial interests comes again through strongly here, while a deeper commitment to environmental improvement is questioned. This point was also argued by a long serving county councillor, who argued that developers would build similar developments to those they build currently without local (regional or national) government intervention, but that any environmental measures would stop at the edge of the development.

> If the developers approach were permitted without any constraint, I still think they would build very nice houses in nice situations that would not extend beyond their boundaries and try and make an improvement.

However, this concern for attractive green settings is contradicted by the desire of developers not to lose potential land for housing. Hence, another message that came across in interviews was the reluctance of developers to lose any land from a site, even when giving up part of the land could secure planning permission. Thus, a local environmental group reported provided the following example from Leighton Buzzard:

> I think they would be far more ready to consider environmental benefits which don't actually cost them much or take up large chunks of land so they don't lose too many houses. I suppose one such example of this is the old car auction site near Leighton Buzzard, down by the river. It's in an area that can get flooded and there was an application to build on, which was refused because they wanted to put too many houses on it. If they had been prepared to leave a bit more space, given the proximity to the river, they might have got it. They've just left it at the moment.

This site was the subject of five articles in 1998 in the *Leighton Buzzard Observer*. The developers, Crest Homes, did eventually submit a revised application in November 1998, which was again turned down because the company was only

prepared to reduce the number of dwellings from 50 to 49. This example gives an indication of the reluctance of developers to utilise all the space on a site, which can reduce their capacity to use land for the environmental enhancement of sites.

But market considerations are not the only ones that raise nature conservation issues for builders. In addition to the marketing potential of wildlife, house builders face significant legal considerations when planning new developments that affect wildlife interests. One of the largest examples of this is at Elstow Storage Depot, where the owner, National Power, and the building company, JJ Gallagher Construction, were reported to be spending £150,000 to provide replacement habitats for great crested newts:

> A power company is spending over £150,000 moving cannibalistic newts to Wilstead. National Power, along with JJ Gallagher Construction, is developing the Elstow Storage Depot site, which is home to a colony of great crested newts. The newts which are know for a tendency to eat their own young are fully protected under British and European law, and it is illegal to disturb the six inch creatures or their habitat. .... 'We like to be good neighbours and have a good local relationship with the local community, we are doing this to safeguard the future of the great crested newts' said John Wilkinson, spokesman for National Power.
> (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 2nd April 2000)

From a legal perspective, wildlife was also significant because surveys for it, unlike much of the rest of the environmental assessment work, have to be carried out at certain times of the year. Several builders, particularly the smaller, regional companies, commented on the delays involved in meeting this requirement. Perhaps not surprisingly, developers did not always view wildlife interests in a favourable light. Sometimes they viewed the costs of attending to wildlife concerns to be so high that they publicly questioned the measures they were asked to take. The following example is from a national company that operates in Bedfordshire, describing a development across the boarder in Northamptonshire.

> We had the largest colony of great crested newts, 30,000 breeding crested newts and we were building a special reserve. We actually carved off a section of the site and shifted these newts. And this was costing... we had spent £2.3 million on the great crested newts. You may love the great crested newt to death but there was all this garbage about the great crested newt being an endangered species. It's not endangered. It's classified as endangered but it's all over the place. It's just that nobody has a mechanism by which you can gauge how many there are. You can't walk round and count them. Pandas you can because you can't miss them but great crested newts slithering on stones and living in banks?

Clearly, this point stands in contrast with the message offered earlier on the Beazer Homes development at Saxon Gate in Biggleswade. At one level this indicates the difficulty of generalising about developments, as these are influenced by site size, pre-existing local (environmental) attractions, state of the housing market, and so on. There are also market considerations, for, as with the Watermead development in Aylesbury that Murdoch and Marsden (1994) report on, when developers are seeking to build prestige developments, there is more incentive to provide 'environmental attractions' on site. Hence, while legal requirements need to be responded to, a complex array of forces is likely to impact on developer attitudes and willingness to be positive over nature conservation opportunities. What can be said in this regard is that, in the context in which Bedfordshire is not viewed as a high quality local housing market, the general tendency is for builders to engage reluctantly with initiatives that could enhance nature conservation, except when they see direct commercial gains resulting.

The Management of Building Materials and Waste

The environmental considerations examined so far have all been to do with the design and location of housing estates, but builders also recognised that the management of waste and building materials on site was an important environmental issue, especially given that these aspects of the house building process impacted on their day-to-day operations. Notably, this element of the house building process was not an environmental issue that was raised by any of the other interviewees, including local authorities and environmental groups, despite the significant amounts of building waste that require attention, primarily through landfill. Yet for builders this was a key issue. As one of the volume builders made clear in interview, for every planning application the company submits it produces a sustainability report with a very strong focus on the management of building materials:

> Every application we submit now there is a sustainability report attached to it and again the detail will depend on the site. We identify issues such as recycling and re-use of materials, locally sourced materials and all those types of issues in a sustainability report, at a very early stage in the planning application.

Included in the considerations that volume builders indicated that they took on board before the development process began were evaluations of the problems of contaminated land, of using dangerous materials (including asbestos) and of the rising costs of ordinary landfill disposal. When asked about their environmental priorities, medium-sized companies also stressed that the management of building materials on site and the disposal of waste were key issues for them:

> We are always trying to reduce our waste because it obviously costs us money at landfill sites. We use Ply bends in the first floor which saves an amazing amount of timber. Its also easier to carry because it's lighter. It gives you a stronger, stiffer floor. Yes, we are always looking at ways to reduce waste.

The management of site waste was just as much an issue for small companies as for volume and medium-sized builders. As one company, that builds about 30 houses a year(mainly for housing associations) observed, for one of its sites the company had been commended for their work on this issue:

> We won a small award on that, didn't we. It was a garage which had been poorly run, so there had been massive discharges of petrol historically. There had been fires, because the person who ran the site was incompetent, but still ran a garage there. We came along and got the site and, of course, the environmental people were crawling all over us. Not because of who we are but because of historically how badly the site had been run. So we ended up doing all the remedial work..... converting a badly run garage to a development of 12 houses.

More examples of this kind could be given, but the above provide a sense of the general trend. The important message to grasp is that, for building waste and the management of building materials on site, efficient operations were a very high priority for builders. This arose as a priority independently of pressure from external sources, such as environmental pressure groups or local government. But this is to be expected for a commercial organisation, for the issues that most concern were those related to the volume and type of materials used, which have clear cost implications. As regards the disposal of waste, no builder revealed an environmental concern over types of disposal; the emphasis was on the cost of disposal, not on the environmental consequences of different types of waste loss. In passing, as in using less materials, the builders acted in a manner that could lead to less environmental pressure, but this was not the primary consideration in their actions – a by-product, not a key decision criterion.

Estate Layout and Housing Design

But what of the estates and housing developers are designing and constructing? Were there no key environmental issues raised here? In brief the answer is no, at least in so far as such concerns had a fundamental environmental emphasis. Take the issue of estate design. All developers were concerned about this issue, but the key issue in layout for them was to create 'rural' or 'village' appearances, for marketing purposes. This was by one of the volume house builders:

> Most of the sites [are] tailored to the particular architectural styles of that area. We try and create new village environments really, get away from your standard estate. So there aren't any layout implications other than us driving to get a good layout.

Indeed, as regards environmental issues, even when pressed builder interviewees and other interviewees were reluctant to comment on layout, with the impression given that they did not perceive a link between the layout of estates and environmental issues. Hence, no builder interviewee mentioned environmental considerations in the layout of their estates; not even in terms of designing to make the most of passive solar energy or to encourage walking, cycling and bus use.

As regards housing design, the only builders who expressed concern about a range of environmental issues affecting their new build programme in general (rather than just special sites) were those building for housing associations. They expressed concern over a wide range of issues, including building houses with materials that contain less embodied energy, building to very high standards of energy efficiency and water conservation measures. These latter two issues were linked to expected home occupiers need for low domestic bills. Such companies were also investigating coming off mains drainage, using reed-bed systems to managed waste water instead. But while such issues were under consideration, interviews with agents who had a broad perspective on house builders within the region indicated that many competing environmental priorities could result in none delivering the benefits they are supposed to. A regional government official gave an example from a development she was involved with at the planning stage:

> I know sometimes we criticise environmental benefits... they have too many uses. For example, the public open space that is supposed to have a balancing [lake] in it but they [the developer] have turned it into a canoe lake, a bird watching site and .... we would be hesitant to support that again because it goes beyond its role, the function of the land. We think

> that is going over the top. We need to slow down and think what the land is being used for. Keep it to a minimum. Let's just say a wildlife or wetland site where people going for walks, end of story.

This conflict between providing public access to sites, particularly when local government is providing some funding for the on going management and the nature conservation requirements of the species and habitats has also been raised by Boucher and Whatmore (1993) as a source of potential conflict. While these problems with implementing environmental measures that are promised will be discussed later in the chapter, the essential message for the end of this section of the chapter is the absence of breadth in builders recognition of how they could be using building development to yield environmental enhancements.

Why Builders don't build to higher environmental standards

When investigating why builders do not build to higher environmental standards there was a high degree of consensus from non-builder interviewees. Nineteen of the 26 interviewees who expressed a view argued that money was the most important factor that stopped developers taking environmental concerns more seriously. This view is well exemplified in the following quote from a Greenpeace spokesperson:

> Money. It is as simple as that. I mean we have been campaigning for many years, as I say, to get companies to put solar panels on houses, but it all depends on money. Until the money is spent initially, nothing is going to happen.

To be clear on this point it was not simply environmental groups who thought cost was the primary concern, as is illustrated by the following comments from a regional government official:

> I'd have thought just profits. They think sometimes let's build as many houses as we can in an area regardless of the consequences... without thinking of the surface drainage.

Financial cost was seen to be the overriding factor, irrespective of whether housing association developments or private developments were involved. As an interviewee from another regional government body put it:

> Tax breaks. It boils down to money whichever way you cut it, whether it's affordable housing development, you have got additional funding coming into it if there are higher environmental standards. And then in the private sector, tax breaks or whatever, to encourage high standards of environmental build.

To put this in context, it was recognised that builders did have significant cost considerations to weigh up. Thus, speaking specifically about developments around

Bedford, one of the village societies argued that developers already had a lot of pressure to put infrastructure on a site and to move protected species. Having spent large amounts of money on such requirements they would be unlikely to spend money on optional features:

> As a business they are there to make money. Without a doubt the economics of the thing [is critical] because it costs money to care for the environment. They are going to have to spend a lot of money complying with the conditions for building the road, lakes for the water running-off the road, a lot of money building a place for the newts to go, a lot of money doing all of those things. So the only reason why they don't want to do it is that it costs a lot of money.

This focus on money as a significant barrier to greener building received some support from builders. Thus, David Holliday of Admiral Homes, a Bedfordshire company that has won an environmental award for their developments at Milton Keyes, argued that developers should get financial incentives to encourage building to higher environmental standards:

> He wanted the government to give more positive support to the idea, by offering a financial incentive, such as a tax allowance to be added to mortgage relief, on homes that can achieve the environmental standard set by BRE. (*Dunstable Gazette* 26th April 1995)

This message was broadly viewed with favour by interviewed builders. All the builders thought that building to higher environmental standards would cost money, with the cost implications of changing regulations, even in the short-term, picked up by one of the volume builders:

> For example, if you bought a large site for apartments 12 months ago and you were going to build it in 12 months time the building regulations have changed tremendously since that period and you are probably looking at several thousand pounds per unit just to implement those changes.

However, within the overall consensus that money is the single most important factor limiting builders taking environmental concerns more seriously, other significant issues were raised by interviewees. One point that was raised by two interviewees, one from the radical group Earth First! and one from the CPRE, was the importance of environmental education, for all groups, from builders to local government. Although not making this point directly, one member of a village society pinpointed one lapse in environmental understanding that could benefit from education, with the

force of this point striking home when the same interviewee signified that all the builders he had dealings with were all over 50:

> Having not been subject to the sort of basic environmental education which I managed to lap up and which I'm sure will have got taught to you, education routinely includes some consideration of the environment, which was not the case if you're 50 plus.

The limitations of builder awareness was also raised by a regional government spokesperson. She argued that builders do not see building the environment as part of their job. "And by the very nature of the business, house builders build houses rather than build the environment, so that's where they see their job". Schemes and initiatives to encourage builders to behave in a more environmentally sound way could be take up by those already convinced rather than making new recruits. This has been found in agricultural environmental schemes where well managed businesses with an existing interest in conservation are those that taken up such schemes (Potter et al 1991). But of course, for builders, the financial rewards come from house building, and only on occasion do they envisage monetary rewards from environmental enhancement. Moreover, in a context of limited resources, there are often competing demands for funding, which can lessen the emphasis others place on builders to provide environmental goods. Hence, the local authorities can trade-off the environment against other goals, which also cost money, that are deemed to be politically more important:

> I mean I'm very aware we live in the real world. Community facilities or recreation facilities or whatever happens to be on that list. It's hard to argue the case for bits of planting of woodland, although you know the health benefits [of new woodlands] have proven to be wonderful. (Representative of country management environmental group)

This interviewee accepted that there would be other public priorities, including community facilities and recreation provision, but argued that sometimes these could be combined with environmental improvements. From this perspective, habitat creation, which gives opportunities for new public open space and provides opportunities for local people to take exercise, could meet other policy goals, as for example for those related to public health. But the sense of interviewees in general was that the current weight in political pressure was to build houses, given expected shortages within South East England, and that this requirement made all other issues

less significant: "At present, purely because there is all that pressure to build houses I feel very strongly that this is just steamrollering everything else" (Interviewee from a village society).

As for builders, they recognised that a number of factors other than money affected their choices. An issue closely linked to money was the lack of pressure from potential buyers for environmental enhancement. This confirms findings in the literature. For example, Barlow (1999) found that builders views of their customers were that they were not aware of different construction methods, such as timber frame so it was difficult to them market this product positively. Similarly Ball (1999) stresses that most builders and estate agents view consumer preferences as very conservative. Unlike other products consumers worry about the value of their property and opt for more conventional styles than they might otherwise have done. This point was made by several interviewees, with their views exemplified by a volume builder:

> I think the only thing that stops us going even further is cost more than anything, the fact that you still have to be competitive in a competitive market and if purchasers aren't recognising or demanding a particular product then, yes, you could sell it as an eco-type house, if it had a particular well-promoted product or brand. But when a customer is comparing prices on an estate and you have two houses identical in size and type and one has a fairly good, you know adequate, sustainable levels at purchase, they may not always go for a house that's triple glazed for example that costs £5,000 more, because they wouldn't necessarily see the benefits of that.

As an interviewee from a regional, medium-sized company that builds more expensive houses declared:

> I think if the house buyers were saying to us we desperately want solar panels and they were prepared to pay the premium for them to be incorporated into the house, I think we wouldn't think twice about it.

Similar sentiments were expressed by a journalist who wrote on the housing market in Bedfordshire:

> I think with housing, for it to make a substantial difference, it's got to make a substantial difference in price. I mean I know something like wall insulation, which most houses now have in, and energy efficiency in certain terms. But I guess to do things like water efficiency, like solar heating, stuff like that, it is going to cost a lot of money and, particularly in the current housing climate, where houses cost a lot of money anyway, I guess people just don't bother about it. Obviously, if the demand was there that's what developers would be building.

Officers in local government recognised this point exactly:

> I'm sure they'd cost more than a standard house. I mean if you developed triple-glazing, insulation everywhere and all the rest of it, I'm sure you could pick up fantastic savings in energy, but they'd obviously cost more. Something that would probably make the development an effective place to live, and for the residents they're paying less for heating and everything, but I don't know it they would be prepared to pay the cost of it. (District council planning officer)

As far as the builders themselves are concerned, they argued that buyers generally have a low understanding of the green measures that can be incorporated into new houses:

> I think even if you put a certain [environmental] product into something and tried to explain it to a customer, without that sort of general understanding about what certain things can do in terms of energy efficiency, something like that, then you find most people wouldn't perhaps know what you are talking about and wouldn't be prepared to pay the extra. I think there is probably not enough public knowledge about those types of things for it to be asked for on a widespread basis by customers.

What should be set against this point is the inherent conservatism of builders, amongst whom the literature suggests that most are reluctant to change their product unless they feel a market is certain (Ball, 1999, Barlow, 1999). However, unlike in other sectors, there have been no attempts to change consumer conservatism in the ways other industries have done by encouraging preferences for their newest products. Interview evidence also pointed to this explanation for the slow take-up of some environmentally-sound options, as signalled by one volume builder who had been involved in the Greenwich Millennium village:

> ... then we have also got our national examples of sort of Greenwich Millennium Village, which we developed in London, which trials all of the new. I mean in that particular case was trialled lots of environmental issues and designs. We tried all of the new ideas you may not feel comfortable doing on a new estate. But it would be unusual to trial them on normal products without trying them on an estate either similar to that or research by a lot of promotive people in Regulations.

This interview suggested a reluctance to innovate unless this was for a special project on which environmental innovation was being encouraged. As a medium-sized regional company representative put it:

> You have got to be competitive with other house builders as well, you sort of want to keep yourself at a similar level as everybody else. People are worrying about pioneering too much and ruling themselves out of the market basically.

Some company officers were quite open in recognising that the firm they worked for lacked innovation:

> Yes, well when you come to build a house and you specify what they are to have and what materials you are going to use, you can get stuck in a bit of a rut, you know, we've used it for that, and it was fine, so we will use it for this.

A reluctance to innovate came across as a particular feature of builders who were used to developing in brick, who were coming under increasing pressure from building regulations to meet higher standards and to use other methods, particularly timber frame:

> We are traditional builders. We still use block and brick. We use solid floors. That's partly because, you know, we have been going for a long time and we know how to build them like that.

So builders appeared aware of their own conservatism but in many instances attributed this to convervatism in potential buyers:

> We experiment with new materials and new products but most housing, people who buy most houses, are conservative in their approach. They don't want a yellow roof. They want a brown or a red roof. They don't want bright yellow or green striped bricks. They want a house that looks like a house. So I suppose we are all a bit conservative in our approach to how experimental we are. We are using ply beams in the floor and things the public can't really see, but they are at the forefront of building technology. (Medium sized regional house builder)

A point worth noting here is that, although all builders were asked about this, only two interviewees felt that the mortgage and insurance industry affected house building styles. One of these was an interviewee in a regional government agency, the other was a developer who had built on many former Ministry of Defence sites and was carrying out a mixture of renovation and new build on these sites. In both instances these interviewees argued strongly that the mortgage and insurance industries were negative forces in raising environmental standards in house building. For the mortgage industry, this was explained by the regional government interviewee in the following terms:

> The way the mortgage system is structured is to look at the cost price. When you go to your bank to get a mortgage, they don't say, 'well what are your running costs going to be over the next 25 years?' They say, 'how much money do you want up front'. If the financial system was different, if when you went for a mortgage the SAP rating or the lifetime running cost was a determining factor in you obtaining your mortgage, that would actually start to shift the whole paradigm and shift the way that

> people view buying houses, and that, in turn, would shift the way builders build houses.

The role of the mortgage lenders has been highlighted as a strong force for conservatism in the early literature (Ball, 1983). More recently Ball (1999) argues that in the current liberalised mortgage market while, cautious of stylistic innovation tends to follow consumer preferences. However Ball (1999) notes the problems some council tenants have faced selling council housing because of the reluctance of lenders to lend on non-traditional forms. Yet the fact that only two interviewees mentioned the role of financial institutions indicates that this was not seen to be a central issue in building decisions. Of course, this comment must be read in the context of what has already been explored in this chapter, which includes the inherent conservatism of builders, such that they are not at the forefront in seeking out new house building styles of modes that could yield environmental improvements. Viewed in this light, it might well be that mortgage and insurance companies are not seen as an impediment because companies are not asking the kinds of questions that hold out the potential of inducing negative responses.

Delivering Genuine Environmental Benefits

Many measures promoted by developers as environmental improvements were viewed by other actors as mitigation measures. The important difference between these two is that, in enhancement, there is a net environmental benefit, although of course what is a net benefit can be disputed. In the case of mitigation, measures are put in place to limit the damage a development causes to the environment. A good example of mitigation, which was commented upon by many interviewees from the south of the county and from county-wide groups, as well as receiving wide coverage in the local press, is the Lancott Meadow development in Dunstable:

> County wildlife sites, they haven't got statutory protection but there is a presumption against planning permission on a county wildlife site, so what you usually end up with is you, as you know, that if they want to, they can plough it up tomorrow. you usually end up in a debate as to how much of it you can save and how much they can build on. So there is one outside Dunstable, [for] which there is half of the site, is now going to be a nature reserve on Lancott Meadow, and the other half is packed to the gunnels with grotty little houses. So you could say they have offered an

> environmental benefit, but only because it was the only way they could build on half the site. (Countryside management environmental group)

This case is really mitigation rather than enhancement because the wildlife value is reduced by building on half of the site. Developers in this instance were funding the long-term management of the remaining half of the site. In the long-term this could potentially bring wildlife benefits, as a higher quality of management was better than a larger area of declining and poorly managed habitat. However, the developers ran into problems developing the other part of the site at high density, as described below by a paid employee of one of the environmental groups:

> There is a site in Dunstable, Lancott Meadow. While they were building houses, which were too close to a badger set, and we spoke to them with English Nature in terms of the licensing side and said if you rearrange your layout you would be able to conform to the legislation.

In the developers desire to build as many houses as possible on half the site, they threatened a legally protected species. The developers were effectively taking risks with environmental features in order that they could include more dwellings on the site, and so reduce the provision of space for wildlife and community use. This example reflects similar findings from Boucher and Whatmore (1993) who found that housing developers favoured developing a concentrated area of conservation on a site rather than integrating nature conservation into their developments.

In addition to the debate about whether an environmental feature is enhancing or mitigating, another significant feature is whether environmental measures that are promised by developers are actually delivered on the ground. The most prominent example in the county of developers not providing environmental benefits that were promised is the Fallowfield Estate in Sandy. A number of interviewees raised the example of Fallowfields as a clear case of environmental and amenity measures being promised in design briefs but not being delivered in the final product:

> Nearly a thousand householders are still awaiting facilities on their estate they were promised five years ago... They claim they were promised shops, a restaurant, a pub and a five acre children's play area – and nothing has been provided... Debbie Rea who bought her house two and a half years ago [said] 'there are old people on this estate who cannot go anywhere because there are no bus routes. And yet they have just been given permission to build another 130 houses'. (*Bedfordshire on Sunday* 22nd April 2000)

Similar issues were also raised in connection with a development of approximately 575 houses at RAF Sandridge near Leighton Buzzard. Here, the initial plans, unlike

those for Fallowfields, included no community facilities at all - no shops, no community centre, no doctor's surgery, no pub and no restaurant. The plans did, however, include open space provision and play areas for children. But the developers were particularly keen to use all the land possible for housing, as became clear from later amendments to the design of the estate. In the end the open space provision with a children's play area was located in a far corner of the site. This was criticised by the local preservation society as unsafe, as children's play areas should be overlooked. The site was also criticised as, at a late stage, a lake was included to take surface water run-off that counted as part of the open space area, so reducing effective open space provision for residents further. Finally, the developers, Beazer Homes, having gained planning permission for the site, put in a second planning application to build three houses on the children's play area (*Leighton Buzzard Observer*, 3rd October 2000). The final open space provision for this estate, including this planning application remained unresolved at the end of the study period.

Conclusion Chapter Eight: Do Developers Accept Ecological Modernisation?

At the start of this chapter a number of possible reasons were put forward why builders may choose to develop to higher environmental standards. Firstly, they may choose to develop to higher standards in areas of high development pressure. However, this factor will only come in to play if raising environmental standards in these areas of high development pressure is welcomed by the local authority and increases the chances of gaining planning permission. Developers were able to give a few instances where this trend had occurred but all were outside Bedfordshire. While Bedfordshire did contain attractive villages where developers could gain a high price from a sale there were no prestige locations where high environmental standards were required, when compared for example, to central Cambridge. This lead to builders operating a twin track approach. Producing their standard product in the majority of locations and developing to higher standards reluctantly in a small number of locations where the extra work was compensated for by high sale prices. This point is also significant because it shows builders are aware of what they need to do to developer to higher environmental standards, which perhaps suggests that approaches

that focus on educating builders in the technologies available may provide limited results. A second factor to be considered was whether the size of the builder impact on environmental performance. Here the evidence was inconclusive. While some interviewees pointed to positive relationships with smaller builders, particularly in sensitivity to local design, others criticised local builders for a poor performance and some argued that small developers were often not very local, coming from neighbouring Hertfordshire and therefore did not have local knowledge or a local reputation to maintain. The builders also lacked concerted pressure from environmental groups and from local government, discussed in the previous two chapters.

The evidence from all the builders interviewed suggests that they do not accept the principles of ecological modernisation and do not feel ongoing pressure to undertake housing developments to higher environmental standards. The environment, as discussed earlier was seen in almost every instance as a cost the developer which would be difficult to pass on to the consumer. This direct evidence from builders is backed up by material from other interviewees and media sources. The only significant work carried out by builders above the statutory minimum is related to wildlife and landscape issues, which were generally embarked upon because of perceived marketing benefits. Yet, even here, a lack of specialist knowledge on the nature of environmental enhancement often hampered their efforts, as did their reluctance to reduce the number of houses on the site. While some developers argued they were hampered by conservatism from buyers, they showed little willingness to innovate in areas that the buyers would remain unaware of, the invisible features of the dwelling and the construction process itself. Only three approaches were recorded where companies felt that developing to a higher environmental standard could be good for their business. The first of these was when a development could engage in 'nature conservation' to improve the image or landscape of their development. Developers saw obvious returns here from a better visual appearance, which they felt should be instrumental in attracting potential buyers. Secondly, one volume builder argued that, although environmental features were expensive, it could be even more expensive not to plan ahead, citing his company's commitment to stay ahead of building regulations, rather than make costly changes in design at a late stage, as an

indication of this commitment. Significantly, however, when a trawl through the local media was undertaken, and this was combined with reports on building companies derived from environmental groups, government officials, and builders themselves, this view was recorded for only one company in Bedfordshire. Finally, builders who worked for housing associations, while subject to cost restrictions on their developments that limited their capacity to be especially innovative, did show a greater willingness to trial or research into measures that could benefit the environment. This is of course tied in part to a greater interest in who lives in the house and their comfort and utility bills than most mainstream builders who are largely unconcerned by this issue. The theoretical implications and the wider impacts of this reluctance by builders to engage in more environmentally sound development are now addressed in the concluding chapter.

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Chapter Nine

Conclusion

This thesis has examined whether environmental standards are being raised in new build housing in rural areas. It has considered whether increases in environmental standards could be related to changes in policy and practice that are broadly termed ecological modernisation. At the start of the research three key groups of actors were identified as having a significant role in the development of new housing in rural areas: house builders; local government; and civic and environmental groups. During the research other significant individuals, including those who worked for regional government agencies, the local media and local MPs, were identified as also having an important role. Having investigated housing construction from the perspective of these different agents, the research strongly suggests that environmental standards are not being raised consistently in new build in rural areas. This concluding chapter will briefly review why environmental enhancements are not occurring and try to account for the failure of ecological modernisation to become embedded in the approaches of different actors.

Housing in Bedfordshire emerged during the research as a significant area of policy conflict between environmental interests and development interests. It was consistently identified by local government and environmental groups as either the most important issue affecting the county or the joint most important with transport and regeneration. A high and increasing level of conflict was also apparent from a study of media reports. The other important issues in the county including waste, regeneration, transport, including airport expansion, mineral extraction and leisure and industrial developments, did not deflect from the fact that housing was a central policy issue. It is not possible to argue that local government and environmental groups were focusing their efforts to raise environmental standards on other issues they regarded as more important, so housing was being neglected. It is significant here that, despite high levels of conflict, developers did not try to deflect or neutralise conflict by developing to higher environmental standards.

Local government representatives consistently argued that their organisations tried to apply pressure on builders to raise environmental standards. However, despite this broad aim, their achievements appeared modest at best. Local government officials had difficulty providing examples where their recommendations resulted in specific changes to housing developments. It was hoped that during the research examples of good practice or short case studies would emerge. It would then be possible to compare these examples of good practice to other cases where higher standards did not emerge and to examine what factors influenced where these higher standards did take place. In this instance other than superficial integration of wildlife concerns and more sympathy to local design styles there were no examples which could be drawn on. This lack of success by local government can be attributed to a number of factors. The question of central government involvement in local government affairs was discussed in detail in Chapter Seven. Here it was found that the ability of central government to overturn local decisions, and provide the seemingly rigid framework for decision making through the use of PPGs and inspectors decisions at public inquiries, limits the flexibility and nature of approaches local authorities are able to adopt. Of course some local authorities given less central direction and more freedom may not choose to raise environmental standards and instead adopt a policy environment that favoured unregulated economic growth. However given the electoral pressures faced and the serious environmental implications of the larger developments, particularly traffic and flooding this seems unlikely. This has links to a broader debate within environmental policy about whether locally developed environmental policy is intrinsically better because local people can see and have to live with the environmental consequences of their actions (Pepper, 1996).

The literature might also lead us to think that the shift from (local) government to (local) governance has the further capacity to limit local government influence. This shift from government to governance was certainly occurring and was evident in a wide range of policy areas: from the increased reliance on consultants with limited local knowledge rather than planning officers to the reallocation of nature conservation policy to environmental groups including advise and site management. Most significant of all is the shift from direct provision of housing by local

government to a reliance on private developers to deliver housing policy. There is no doubt that local government needs housing developers, especially larger developers, to deliver new housing, but there is no evidence of a partnership between the two, not at least in the sense that this has the potential to affect the delivery of environmental benefits. A combination of internal political conflicts and an extreme nervousness about behaving inappropriately towards business interests stopped the potential for working in partnership before it began. Also, as both interviewees from environmental groups and those in local government made clear, there were other priorities in new housing schemes other than environmental considerations. This was particularly important in the case of the larger developments near Bedford and on the former military sites in the rest of the county, where the District and County Council sought funding for major road infrastructure developments. The large sums of money that these councils were requesting from developers limited their flexibility to push for environmental enhancements, as well as shrinking developer funds that could be made available for environmental improvements.

But on their own these factors do not offer a satisfactory explanation for the weakness of environmental emphases in housing developments, for a number of mainstream developers described how they were building to higher environmental standards in other counties. However, developers did not welcome pressures to move away from their standard product and indicated that they would not wish all their sites to entail this extra work. They acknowledged that pressure from local government could be a significant factor in the environmental content of housing developments, but such pressure did not make its presence felt in Bedfordshire, despite the expressed intentions of local authorities. This research argues that this is attributable to several significant factors. Firstly, despite its rural locations and attractive villages, Bedfordshire is not seen as a prestige location for new development, when compared to say Hertfordshire or Cambridgeshire, where house prices are much higher. Bedfordshire was described as a 'tatty' location by interviewees. For this researcher, the struggling town centres of Dunstable and Bedford, that were visited frequently for interviews, created an impression that endorsed this view. Secondly, the failure of local government in Bedfordshire to raise environmental standards could be attributed

to an implementation gap. This concept refers to situations where local authorities and the central government have a genuine desire to raise environmental standards in new house building, but implementation 'problems' prevent this from taking place. In this regard, Palumbo and Calista (1988) outline six reasons why there is a gap between policy and implementation, four of which appear to apply to the failure to raise environmental standards in new house building in Bedfordshire's rural areas.

They argue that much legislation and, in the Bedfordshire case, guidance passed at the national and local level is symbolic, usually promising to do something about intractable problems that have been on the public agenda for many years. The gap between the aim to shift to fiscal measures, such as suggestions about the introduction of green taxation in many national environmental policy documents, and the very limited number that have so far been implemented, are one example of the gap between the rhetoric of national environmental policy documents and the programmes that are delivered. A lack of progress on environmental and housing issues could also be attributed to poorly framed national policy documents, as described in detail in Chapter Two, and by weak diffusion of environmental inputs in local policy documents. Certainly, it emerged from interviewees that local government did not appear to have a clear set of environmental priorities, so house builders could not see what was required of them in environmental terms when they planned to build in the county. In the cases where local authorities did pressure house builders, the builders were very clear from the outset that if they were to build on certain sites they must incorporate particular features such as more water efficient drainage systems. Without this guidance builders were not clear what features the local authority requires of them so by default took the easiest route and built their standard product. Disturbingly, councillors and officers themselves did not seem to have a clear vision of environmental priorities for their area of jurisdiction. It is hardly therefore surprising then that such priorities were not communicated to builders.

For Palumbo and Calista, legislation and advice is often not based on a sound programme or theory that offers guidance on what designs will make target groups, in this case house builders, and to a lesser extent buyers of new houses, behave in a way

that is considered desirable by policy makers. Bedfordshire house builders made clear that the main reasons they did not build to higher environmental standards were financial. If they are to build to higher environmental standards, developers need positive financial signals from different levels of government. This could be provided in the form of tax advantages for green building compared to conventional building, in research grants to experiment with new products and methods, and faster and more reliable decision making for housing schemes that are of a high environmental quality, so capital is not tied up for long periods. This last point about greater speed and reliability in approving environmentally high quality developments is one that is within the power of local government to deliver. Builders made clear that they did not feel that an environmentally high quality application would result in any advantages for them in the planning processes.

This leads on to Palumbo and Calista's final two points, about insufficient resources being committed to programmes and to those who implement programmes not having the appropriate 'know how'. The interviews for this thesis certainly revealed that there were major gaps in knowledge about what was possible in terms of green housing. This applied for all geographical scales, from the individual house through to issues of location (and beyond). Most disconcerting here was a lack of knowledge about the environmental implications of estate layout and design. It is worth noting that, while many building decisions relating to individual houses are covered by national building regulations, over the question of layout there is considerable local discretion. Yet local government representatives and builders seemed unaware that changes to layout could have major implications for the environmental performance of developments. When asked about where they obtained information about the environmental implications of new housing, most local government representatives revealed that they were very dependent on a small number of government documents, particularly PPG3 and its daughter documents. In addition to this gap in the training and expertise possessed by (some of) those who regulate housing developments, there was also a shortage of resources that planning departments were able to devote to housing schemes. This was a particular issue in Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire. In South Bedfordshire there had been a very high turnover in planning

staff, which made tracking the implementation of specific schemes difficult. Mid Bedfordshire was a small local authority that had problems coping with planning applications that involved larger developments, as was seen particularly in the failure to see through the development of a large former mental hospital into housing between Stotfold and Arlesey, which was commented on negatively by developers interviewed and by the public inquiry inspector (*Biggleswade Chronicle* 19th March 1999)

Similarly, environmental and civic groups were not an effective force in raising environmental standards. There is some debate in the literature about the importance of environmental groups in raising environmental standards, with some commentators viewing them as central driving forces (Dunlap and Catton,1979 and Schnaiberg, 1980) while most ecological modernisation commentators view them as one of a number of partners moving from confrontation to a more policy orientated approach (Hajer,1995 and Rudig, 1988). At the national level, civic and environmental groups have been widely acknowledged as a significant force (e.g. Garner, 1996), which was well recognised by the house builders who were interviewed for this research. Most studies of local environmental activism in the UK have focused on high profile cases, particularly major road schemes, where a wide range of campaign tactics have been used, from national media coverage to direct action (Ingalsbee 1996, Doherty 1999, North 1998, Maples 1998, Seel{ed.}2000). However, in Bedfordshire a very different picture emerged. Many groups had a strong focus on wildlife issues, while leaving other issues related to housing and the environment under-represented. Groups suffered from a lack of co-ordination, which lessened their influence over statutory processes, such as public inquiries. This contrasted with the position of builders, who often worked together in consortiums to secure permission for larger sites. The potential influence of local civic and environmental groups, with the exception of the CPRE, also suffered from a lack of support from their national counterparts, who in general did not regard housing as a campaigning priority for local groups. Accordingly, they did not provide campaign support material, briefings and other advice. Finally, groups had narrow campaign repertoires, that relied heavily on responding to official consultation documents. They did not display a capacity to

adopt a variety of lobbying and campaigning tactics, that might have given different entry points or advantages in seeking to influence policy implementation.

Builders themselves did not see that raising environmental standards was beneficial to their business. They argued that house buyers had very conservative tastes and would be unwilling to pay more money for environmental measures. There were some modest exceptions, particularly regarding issues of wildlife and landscape, where builders believed that a higher quality environment made properties sell for higher prices and sell more quickly. They did not see financial advantages in using new techniques and products that could save energy and waste. All of this suggests that more research and the better dissemination of research findings is needed by those promoting green housing, such as the Building Research Establishment and national environmental NGOs. This is needed to put forward a convincing case to builders that standards can be raised at the same time as profitability is assisted. A significant finding from this research, that should be applied in any such efforts, is the reliance of builders on suppliers regarding the environmental standards of their products. Would the results of the research have been different if a supply chain approach was adopted rather than a geographical one? Perhaps as there was some evidence that some suppliers such as local timber merchants seemed to have a strong interest in environmental issues. However, suppliers also had products to sell and in a number of cases convinced builders that poor environmental choices such as Economy Seven heating or PVC windows were the best environmental products. It may be that those lobbying for greener buildings will be more effective if they approach builders using a strategy that wins over suppliers rather than focusing efforts directly on builders themselves.

So what contribution has ecological modernisation made to the understanding of housing development in Bedfordshire and beyond? Clearly, it suggests that the 'win-win' arguments put forward by proponents of ecological modernisation are not accepted by a wide range of actors at the local level. The different actors at a local level held a range of environmental attitudes and values from many earlier phases of environmental thought, most of which were not consistent with ecological

modernisation. This fits with Rydin (2003) who argues that the discourse in planning documents is often multiple and contradictory as different sets of environmental values compete even within one organisation. Moreover, while this study has focused on Bedfordshire, interviews with developers and a review of the literature suggest that, except in the case of a small number of developments, the message is that the principles of ecological modernisation are not being played out in practice and this appears to fit across the broad geographical spread of the British house building industry. Perhaps in some counties there is a stronger input of environmental considerations as a result of better organised environmental groups and more coordinated and directed local government efforts, but the impact these have did not come across as having a fundamental bearing on developer behaviour; influence at the edges perhaps, but not over the core values that drive forward builder decisions and strategies.

It could be that this simply indicates that there is not enough compelling evidence for house builders that they can make a greater profit if they build to higher environmental standards (and it is certain that whatever evidence is available is not getting through to builders in a sufficiently convincing manner to affect their decisions). In this regard it is worth noting that proponents of ecological modernisation have tended to focus their attention on manufacturing industry rather than other sectors of the economy. Here the considerations of profit and loss are focused more directly on products that can be produced in experimental numbers to assess potentialities. For house builders, the 'manufacture' of their product is more complex, with the end product impacted on by considerations at different geographical scales; the house might end up 'working' but the product might not be easily sold (or have to be sold at a disadvantageous price) owing to site design or location. Clear differences can be seen here with the stronger links between builder and end user in many office and commercial buildings where green building standards, called BREAM are more widely accepted. With smaller house builders often not producing many dwellings a year, the potential cost of such experimentation is more likely to be bankruptcy than it is for (what are often large-scale) manufacturers. A few small builders might be able to survive in specialist niche

markets that focus on high quality environmental products but for most builders to venture into such experimentation constitutes too high a risk. Of course, there is also the prospect that builders do not wish to 'go down that road', for the history of environmental concern over the last 30 years has in the main conceptualised the environment and development as inevitably opposed (Barbier, 1987, Trainer, 1985) That said, as profit making organisations, builders can be expected to respond positively to incentives that minimise their risks and lessen the costs of innovative design. If there is a genuine desire amongst the public and at the national government level to see environmental improvement emerging from house building, then offering a financial strategy that engages with builders seems to be an obvious way forward.

Finally, what does this mean for ecological modernisation as a theoretical framework? In some ways other theoretical constructs such as a shift from government to governance and the earlier policy implementation literature have been of more immediate practical use in interpreting the empirical results. So is there I case for abandoning ecological modernisation as a useful avenue for further research in the study of planning and housing? I would argue not. Ecological modernisation provides a useful framework for further study and greater understanding of the planning process. I would argue that although initially seemingly far removed, planning with its focus on the local and with much ecological modernisation policy developed at the international level, they do in fact have much in common. Firstly, an increasing role by European levels of government in local land use regulation is taking place through measures such as the Habitats Directive and directives on environmental assessment and strategic environmental assessment which are narrowing the gulf between the local and the international levels. The next generation of local planning documents will have to give more consideration than ever to these broader frameworks which are embedded with an ecological modernisation approach to environmental problems. Secondly, despite their apparently different ideological foundations planning and ecological modernisation in fact have many features in common. The post-war tradition of land use planning in Britain has been incremental and conservative, trying to work with and accommodate economic and social trends rather than challenge them. This is in many ways similar to ecological modernisation which sees the reform

of existing institutional structures and arrangements rather than their abolition. Both seek an integration of the needs of environment and development, indeed planning has had enshrined in it the idea that development should take place unless material considerations dictate otherwise, presenting development as inherently a positive feature for society. There is also a central feature within both ecological modernisation and the planning system for the role of expertise, planning expertise and scientific expertise, as appropriate ways of addressing environmental problems. Planning has however suffered from a lack of vision which has made it prone to attack from the political right whereas ecological modernisation has managed to accommodate that political agenda. While housing policy has often been described as the "wobbly pillar of the welfare state" (Malpass, 2003), I would argue that planning policy has suffered a similar fate and has repeatedly struggled to reinvent itself as a useful part of the modern state, rather than a left over from a past era. It is here perhaps that ecological modernisation could make a contribution to planning. The adoption of an ecological modernisation agenda by planning professionals and bodies would enable planning to present itself as a positive and reformist, remaining environmental sensitive, but one which does not hinder economic growth and development. Embracing ecological modernisation would require some changes in practices, particularly a greater ability to work in partnership with business and environmental groups to achieve positive outcomes. It would also to some extent require a change in ideology among planners, that the needs of development and environment needs not be contradictory. However, it would not require such a substantial set of reform as those advocated by the radical environmental movement, because despite their differences to two approaches have many features in common outlined above. In chapter two various kinds of ecological modernisation were discussed. Ecological modernisation could permeate the planning system by placing greater reliance on the planner as an environmental expert, part of a technical and scientific elite in decision making. Alternatively, ecological modernisation could lead to a planning system which moves towards more reflexive institutional arrangements (Hajer, 1995). Such reflexivity would allow other voices such as those of communities and developers to be heard in defining the 'environmental problem' of new house building. By removing the monopoly on the definition of the problem the

credibility and acceptability of the solution can be improved. This reflexivity in planning is more in keeping with the Government's reforms of the system which seek greater public engagement but without the protracted conflicts that have marked public engagement in the current system.

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